Eminents observed: a century of writing, lettering, type and typography at the Central School, London

Typeform dialogues

An interactive interface presenting a comparative survey of typeform history & description

Explained and illustrated through its User's Manual and in essays by Catherine Dixon & Eric Kindel

Edited by Eric Kindel

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Author's note

'Eminents observed' was written between 1998 and 2000 to accompany *Typeform dialogues*. The essay was intended to provide historical context for the interface by locating it within a tradition of Central School teaching in the disciplines of writing, lettering, type and typography. The essay was partnered with another by Catherine Dixon that detailed her thinking on systems for classifying typeforms, thinking that had informed her contributions to the *Typeform dialogues* interface.*

In 2012, while preparing the first edition of *Typeform dialogues*, I considered including 'Eminents observed'. But the demands of other work did not allow this. Later, when revisiting the essay, I resolved to finally bring it to a publishable form, regardless of the lapse of time and despite its numerous faults. In preparing the text, I have fixed factual errors, and what I now consider to be errors of interpretation. Throughout, I have made changes to language in an attempt to improve clarity and expression, and I have inserted several new footnotes. I have not otherwise attempted to alter the essay's style (such as it is) or its somewhat tidy trajectory, which are artefacts of its original composition. Nor have I made reference to the activities of the Central Lettering Record subsequent to the writing of the essay, under the curatorship of Phil Baines and Catherine Dixon.

In publishing the text, I would like to thank two esteemed former colleagues, Stuart Evans and the late Justin Howes. In 2000, both provided insightful comments on the text in draft. I am also much indebted to Robin Kinross, who similarly offered valuable comments in 2000, and on the present text. And I extend special thanks to Catherine Dixon, whose own research during the *Typeform dialogues* project, freely shared, had a beneficial influence on my understanding of Nicolete Gray. Catherine likewise gave me helpful comments on the whole of my text in draft. In thanking each of the above, I do not wish to implicate any of them in errors of fact or interpretation that may follow.

Eric Kindel

***** The foreword to the present document (see above, pp. 3–4) gives further details about the original publishing circumstances of *Typeform dialogues*. For Catherine Dixon's essay, 'Systematizing the platypus: a perspective on type design classification', see below, pp. 88–133.

Eminents observed: a century of writing, lettering, type and typography at the Central School, London

The moral is, if we want beautiful type, we must teach children to write beautifully.
Emery Walker, 1888

On copying a Hand.—Our intentions being right (viz. to make our work essentially readable) and our actions being expedient (viz. to select and copy the simple forms which have remained essentially the same, leaving the complex forms which have passed out of use ...) we need not vex ourselves with the question of 'lawfulness'.
Edward Johnston, 1906

We are too apt to be perplexed with what seems to us a jumble of styles to choose from, when acknowledgement of but one style, permitting degrees of elaboration in execution according to circumstances would unravel the whole matter. This is the remedy suggested here. The tool which developed and preserved for us so magnificent an achievement of the Roman alphabet may well be trusted for the performance of our modern needs also.
Graily Hewitt, 1930

I do not intend to present any sort of watertight theory, but to examine examples which I recognize as in some way admirable and to analyse what it is in each which I admire; since the eye, not principle, is the basis of all judgement of visual things. I want to arrive at a new way of thinking about lettering from which nothing is excluded on a priori *grounds.*
Nicolete Gray, 1960

Typeform dialogues has been made in an institution where throughout its history the teaching of writing, lettering, type and typography has occupied a place of great importance. This institution is Central Saint Martins College of Art & Design, known originally as the Central School of Arts & Crafts.[1] During the previous century [i.e. looking back from from the late 1990s] the Central School has employed teachers whose firmly held views on these subjects have shaped its pedagogy. Given the connections between subjects, it is not surprising that those who taught them had common concerns, as well as individual pre-occupations. In the essay that follows, those who taught (or who influenced the teaching) will be observed. Observations will highlight arguments about what sources and techniques, tools and materials, encouragements and prohibitions should be at work, in theory and in practice, in writing, lettering and typography. Attention will focus on Emery Walker, whose valuation of early printing, set out before the Central School opened,

1. The Central School of Arts & Crafts was founded in 1896. It retained this name until 1966 when it was changed to the Central School of Art & Design. Central Saint Martins College of Art & Design dates from 1989 when the Central School and St Martin's School of Art were formally joined under the administration of The London Institute. As the present essay concentrates on the Central School before its merger with St Martin's, this name – the Central School – will be adopted throughout.

influenced its teaching from the outset; on Edward Johnston, whose renewal of formal writing and lettering while at the Central School established a new foundation for its practice; on J. H. Mason and Grailly Hewitt, whose lengthy tenures did much to consolidate the Central School's early innovations; and on Nicolete Gray, whose reconfiguration of the study of letterforms was embedded into the Central Lettering Record she built up in partnership with Nicholas Biddulph. In each instance, the ideas that supported teaching or practice were expressed in quite specific, even idiosyncratic, ways. Thus observations will also note how individuals gave form to their views, in published works or as designed artefacts, on the assumption that as much may be learned from structure and presentation as from content. In making observations of all kinds, historical connections and disjunctures will not be the sole concern. Rather, their compilation is intended to build up a context within which *Typeform dialogues*, as a late addition, may be located.

1

Much of the thinking that would guide instruction in writing, lettering, type and typography at the new Central School of Arts & Crafts was anticipated by Emery Walker. One moment in particular has often served as the first instance when this thinking was cogently set out: 15 November 1888. On that day (in the evening), Walker delivered a lecture entitled 'Letterpress printing' to the Arts & Crafts Exhibition Society in London. In it, he presented highlights in the development of letterforms, type, printing and illustration since the fifteenth century. The lecture was a prescient articulation of the interests and concerns that would revitalize printing in the last decade of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth.

Despite the lecture's foundational role in a now familiar story, Walker's words and pictures were only reassembled by John Dreyfus in the early 1990s.[2] In a compelling investigation, Dreyfus confirmed the lecture's well-known thread of discussion: that early printing was pre-eminent, and set standards from which later efforts slowly declined. He also confirmed Walker's espousal of type partnered and printed in harmony with illustrations, a harmony that was both artistic and mechanical in nature.[3] Type, too, should be well-formed, derived from a vigorous practice of writing; on it all other aspects of printing depended. Walker noted that throughout the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, a living relationship existed between manuscripts and their print and typographical relations. Thereafter writing became debased, a condition echoed in types that were poorer in form and beauty. The ensuing decline terminated in the types of Giambattista Bodoni and related nineteenth-century designs still common in 1888.

Evidence of printing's triumph and fall was provided throughout the lecture by a subtly polemical group of images displayed by means of magic lantern slides. These Dreyfus also reassembled. From them,

and from reminiscences of those present in the audience, it is possible to imagine the persuasiveness of Walker's words and pictures. Recollections suggest that the images were novel both in their subject matter and in their display. Photographic enlargements of letterforms and type were arresting; they and other images of books, manuscripts and woodcuts were enchanting, and intensified by their projection in the darkened hall. Their visual rhetoric formed a powerful partnership with Walker's comments on printing's glorious past and wayward progress.[4]

While this account of the lecture (taken from Dreyfus) omits some details, it does give sufficient indication of Walker's views, which had a great effect not only on his audience that evening but on a movement of printing reform that followed soon after. To give his views in summary: that the historical course of writing, type-making and printing was marked by gradual corruption; that renewal might begin by collecting and examining artefacts of the past to establish guides for present-day practice; and thereafter, that the communication between type-making and writing should be re-established to encourage the latter's revival and its central role in the making of types for books.[5] Crucial to this process were images of letterforms and type brought from the past emphatically into the present through photography that recorded and amplified their forms and could thereby guide new designs.[6]

2

Emery Walker's lecture was well received. Apart from its immediate appeal, it was favourably reviewed at the time, while subsequent versions continued to generate comment in the printing trade press (see figure 1, overleaf).[7] But perhaps of greater consequence was the hold Walker's ideas took on William Morris, in whose Kelmscott Press Walker would play a significant advisory role. Though suffused with Morris's own aesthetic tastes, the books issued by the Kelmscott Press

2. John Dreyfus, 'A reconstruction of the lecture given by Emery Walker on 15 November 1888', *Matrix 11* (Leominster: The Whittington Press, 1991), pp. 27–52.
3. According to Dreyfus's reconstruction, the last third of Walker's lecture addressed the relationship between type, illustration and their combination on the printed page. The artistic harmony referred to was partly one of form, that type and illustration should exhibit some formal equivalence. But true harmony was realized only when type and illustration were mechanically unified, i.e. when printed simultaneously and with the same effect. Indeed, Walker argued that artistic harmony was only made possible by mechanical harmony, and that the relationship should always be determined by the type. Judging from Walker's chosen illustrations, woodcut was the illustration technique he thought harmonized with type most effectively.

4. As May Morris observed, 'the audience … were much struck by the beauty of the "incunables" shown, and by the way they bore the searching test of enlargement on the screen. One after another the old printers passed before us, one after another their splendid pages shone out in the dark room'; and 'The sight of the finely-proportioned letters so enormously enlarged, and gaining rather than losing by the process, the enlargement emphasizing all the qualities of the type'. These comments are extracted from a longer description of the lecture. The effect the images had on her father, William Morris, who also attended the lecture, was said (by her) to have sparked into action his latent interest in printing and led to the establishment of the Kelmscott Press. William Morris, *The collected works of William Morris, with introductions by his daughter May Morris*, vol. 15, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1912), p. xv.

5. This was Walker's preferred scenario. While he is perhaps best remembered for participating in the revival (or reworking) of many historical types, Walker had in fact only proposed this as an interim measure. In his essay 'Printing', published by the Arts & Crafts Exhibition Society (1888), Walker argued that typefounders should endeavour 'to produce once more the restrained and beautiful forms of the early printers, until the day when the current handwriting may be elegant enough to be again used as a model for the type-punch engraver.' It is worth re-emphasizing that Walker focused almost solely on types for books (i.e. for text); the discussion of letters and types for display is conspicuously absent.
6. The excitement generated by Walker's enlargements was only the first indication of their usefulness. Such photography later provided the means for adapting a number of historic types for use by private presses (e.g. Kelmscott, Doves, Cranach, and others).
7. Dreyfus notes Oscar Wilde's attendance at the 1888 lecture and quotes from his enthusiastic review in the *Pall Mall Gazette* the following day. Reports on subsequent versions of the lecture appeared in *The British & Colonial Printer* in 1890 (6/13 February) and 1896 (2 January; see figure 1).

10 THE BRITISH AND COLONIAL PRINTER AND STATIONER. JANUARY 2, 1896.

TYPOGRAPHY.

A LECTURE BY EMERY WALKER

TENNYSON said "Let us TYPE then with our own eyes." Type was to the Laureate typical of a character; a form; or image. Although perhaps surveyed from quite a different standpoint, more materialistic and practical, though none the less artistic, to Mr. Emery Walker, a gentleman whose heart and soul is devoted to the art of typography, and who delivered a most delightful lecture on that subject at the Central Art Department of the Technical Education Board, Bolt-court, the other evening—type is also typical of a certain character, a form, or image, when to his mind it is worthy to be admired, and, according to his remarks, more often to be found in the beautiful bold, clear, round-face type in the old-time books, such as those of the 16th century than in our modern productions, although the punches used by Caslon for casting his beautiful old-style founts which, he said, originated from the 16th century, are still in existence, and was wonder with Mr. Emery Walker that they are not more generally used nowadays. Mr. C. J. DRUMMOND presided over a large and appreciative audience.

Before the commencement of the lecture the CHAIRMAN, in the course of a few prefatory remarks, expressed, as one of the governors of the St. Bride's Foundation Institute, the desire of that body that there should be a complete alliance between the two schools—that at Bolt-court and the one at St. Bride. They were particularly anxious, so far as possible, that the two schools should work in harmony, and should interchange lecturers, and in various ways make themselves useful to one another. At St. Bride they had a large technical library—which was not used as it should be—containing works on typography and lithography; and he therefore proposed that the students at Bolt-court have the free use of that library for technical purposes, as a mark of appreciation of the kind services they at St. Bride had received at the hands of Dr. Garnett and others. This happy suggestion was received with well-merited applause, after which

Mr. EMERY WALKER began his interesting paper, entitled "Typography."

Schoeffer 1462 Jenson 1471 Victorian.

Venetian Writing Master's Copy Book.

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Written Cicero, about 1460.

In introducing his subject he explained his intention of showing a series of views by means of the magic lantern illustrating what was really essential to the production of a book that, in his humble belief, shall be a work of art, and this though not containing a single decoration or picture.

He first dealt in a pleasing way with the materials necessary, remarking that paper, ink and type may be said to be in the production of a book what stone, bricks and mortar are to the erection of a house, for certainly without them there could be neither books nor architecture.

In the work of the latter the first thing to consider was not the painting and the carving, but the material used for walls, floor or roof, and unless sound and well-proportioned all the carvers and painters in the world would fail to make the house beautiful. And so it was with other crafts.

Having stated this simple but pleasing logical truism, the lecturer proceeded to deal with the question of paper, remarking at the outset that no one would dispute that hand-made paper was the best. With a touch of pardonable pride he said one was glad to know that notwithstanding the competition of Germany and Holland the English paper more than held its own—it was more pleasant to the eye.

Then, with regard to type, it behoved to take care to have the best type possible—that which is clear and most readable. They could not go to nature for inspiration of their shapes, but they could see in the types of the early printers and their contemporaneous calligraphers a beauty capable of suggestion and example. He advocated the use of the largest type, always considering its relation to the size of the page, and spoke with disgust of the white line meanderings of modern books, which they never found in old books. He also emphasised the importance that illustrations should be in thorough harmony with the type—an illustration should look as though it belonged to the page and not put in as a botanical specimen.

In reply to a variety of questions that were put to Mr. Walker, in a very interesting discussion which followed, he explained that he considered the much greater weight of the American books as compared with the English was due to the presence of china clay. Generally speaking, he said, all modern books are much heavier than the old ones, the extra weight being due to the same cause. The cheaper American books are particularly bad in this way, and he loudly condemned the way they had of stabbing them together with wire.

Referring to the superiority of handmade paper over machine-made, he said the former was usually made of rags, and rags on the whole made the best paper. Also in making the paper the machine-made paper only shrinks in the width, while the hand-made shrinks all over. He pointed out the adaptability of machine-made paper for working half-tone process blocks, adding, with a grim smile, that anyone had tried to print one of these blocks on hand-made paper, as he had, they would have found out how truly difficult it was.

Turning now to the illustrative part of his lecture, Mr. Walker printed out, in reference to an illustration from a Gerrman missal printed at Cologne in 1451, the legibility of the letterpress which—if it were not for the number of abbreviations that the old printers used, evidently, he said, to suit their own convenience—they would be able to read with almost as much ease as Roman type. Then referring to the "Mazarin Bible" (so called because a copy was found in the Mazarin Library at Paris in 1760), and which he said was probably printed by Gutenberg and perhaps Schoeffer, the colour of the letterpress, he pointed out, maintained the same evenness from one end to the other, and the register was perfectly even all through the book. In fact it was a miracle of typography. The colour of the ink and the press work had never been beaten to this day. In reply to a question from one of the audience, he said he considered it better than the "Sabine Bible," although in the latter the type, perhaps, was more beautiful. The paper, too, was admirable, not having changed in colour, and maintaining a beautiful creamy white.

A specimen page from an edition of the *Psalter*, printed by Peter Schoeffer in 1457, was exhibited, Mr. Walker remarking that the initial was printed in red and blue, it being the first time colour printing had been done. The register, he said,

Milan Type, about 1500.

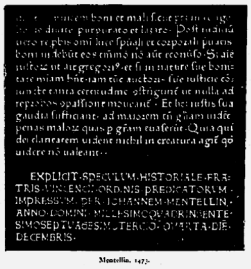
First Book Printed in England by Caxton.

Ramberg Missal and Weimar Missal, 1480.

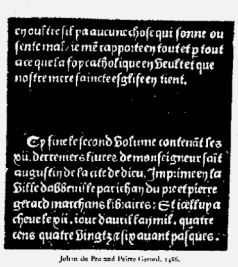
Monumental Tablet in Christchurch Cathedral, Dublin.

Figure 1. Report on a lecture delivered by Emery Walker at the Central Art Department of the Technical Education Board, Bolt Court, London. *The British & Colonial Printer*, 2 January 1896. 437 x 289 mm (page). Despite the lecture's title, the report notes that Walker also discussed paper and ink, the harmony of type and illustration, and the relative poorness of modern printing materials and methods; thereafter he summarized national characteristics of type. The text does not indicate that Walker discussed formal writing or its relationship to type despite the inclusion of many images of handwriting. Not reproduced here but shown by Walker were images of work from the Kelmscott Press;

Specimen from Schoeffer. Psalter in 1457. Printers' ind Jewes.



Mentellin. 1472.

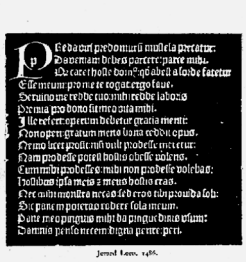


John de Pre and Pierre Gerad. 1486.

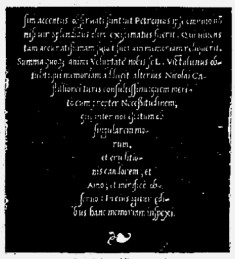
was something wonderful, and various opinions were held as to how this work was done to obtain such true register. He thought the large amount of black letter in vogue in printing English books in these early times originated from some of the German type, which was very unreadable, but he pointed out an example in the screen. Here and there in the page several blank spaces were noticeable in the lines, the reason for which Mr. Walker could not give, "but," he said, with a smile, "it looks as if the compositor could not read his copy, and therefore left the words out!" Certainly the easiest way of getting over the difficult. The spoil the look of their pages by unevenly spaced lines for a mere piece of pedantry.

An example of Flemish type printed in 1481 was given, a very similar type to which, the lecturer said, was used in the 10th century, from which Caslon's type really descended.

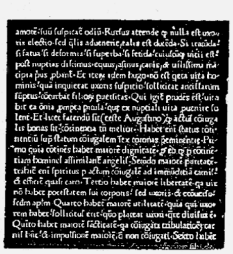
Coming to England, he was sorry for was, and wondered it was not used more than it is. He advocated in laudatory terms wide margins for books, such as was found in these old books, remarking that there was a utilitarian reason for it as well as a good one in other respects. Productions from the Kelmscott Press were shown, including that beautiful



Jenred Leeu. 1486.



Sweynheim and Pannartz. 1467



First Book Printed in Paris.

of the printing of Johan Mentellin, of Strasbourg, 1473, as a very distinct and readable type.

Leaving the German and coming to typography in Italy, the lecturer remarked that the Italians did not take to the beautiful current Gothic spiked type, but went back to the German style. In 1451, the time of the Renaissance, there were something like 9,000 manuscripts in Florence, all written by hand. In 1460 the first book was printed in Venice, and a photograph from this was thrown on

unpersand, it was also observed, was used very frequently in these books, and the lecturer said he did not see why we should not use it nowadays more than we do; Mr. William Morris used it, but he did not know anyone else who did.

Dealing with France, an illustration was shown of the first book printed there about 1170, and referring to the large number of divided words at the end of the lines, that seemed to have been unnecessarily indulged in, Mr. Walker said they were artists then and did not want to

the credit of our country to have to say that the lettering was not quite as beautiful as some they had seen that evening. A page from Caxton's "The Dictes and Sayings of the Philosophers," 1477, the first book printed in England in the English language with the printer's name, was shown, as well as the same printer's "Golden Legend," 1483-84. Some beautiful specimens of Caslon's type were also exhibited, which, the lecturer stated, were set up about 1720, and he pointed out what a clear, wiry, excellent, readable type it

work of Mr. William Morris's. "The Golden Legend," and a lengthy communication was read from Mr. Morris bearing on the subject, which we will not give here, as we hope shortly to publish a report of a lecture by him, which followed this of Mr. Emery Walker's.

At the conclusion of the lecture, a hearty vote of thanks was unanimously accorded to Mr. Emery Walker, on the proposition of Dr. William Garnett, seconded by Mr. W. R. Lethaby, and the meeting terminated.

THE double number of the *Strand* for Christmas has 294 pages full of interesting matter and good pictures. The penny toy trade has an extensive article, profusely illustrated, devoted to ft that should interest our readers.

MR. HENRY ROOME, stationer, bookseller, bookbinder, &c., of 357, Commercial-road, London, E., has acquired the goodwill of the business carried on by Mr. Timbrell, at 390, Commercial-road, London, E., and on Monday the whole of Mr. Roome's old-established business was removed to the last-mentioned address.

"THE CHRISTMAS BOOKSELLER, 1885," being the Christmas number of the *Publishers' Weekly*, an old American contemporary, is an exceedingly glossy got up number, dealing with the Christmas publications in crisp and entertaining articles, amply illustrated, and, in the words of the publishers, "he must indeed be hard to please who will not be gratified as he catches his first glimpse of its contents."

THE probate of the will of the late Mr. W. K. Tillett, of Norwich, has been granted. The testator gave his real and personal property to his wife and appointed her executrix, and he nominated his son, the late Mr. H. E. T. Tillett, to the vacancy which his death would make on the managing committee of the partnership carrying on the *Norfolk News* and other newspapers. The personal estate is sworn at £20,725 18s. 6d., and the net amount at £19,518 13s. 5d.

ACCORDING to *Perry's Weekly Gazette*, in the week ending December 26th there were 122 bills of sale registered in England and Wales, an increase of 17 as compared with the corresponding period last year. The receiving orders gazetted number 97, showing an increase of 14, and the number of registered deeds of arrangement was 70, an increase of 25. In Ireland there were 47 judgments registered, an increase of 20; bills of sale 4, showing an increase of 3; bankruptcies gazetted were 5, and the registered deeds of arrangement 2, an increase of 2. The Scotch returns show 22 recorded protests, an increase of 15; and 31 failures, being an increase of 13.

PRINTERS' PENSION, ALMSHOUSE AND ORPHAN ASYLUM CORPORATION.—We understand that arrangements are being made for a dinner to be held in the Council Chamber of the Holborn Restaurant, on Saturday, February 19th, 1886, to celebrate the establishment of the "Drummond Pension" of £17 per annum, in connection with the Printers' Pension Corporation. This special pension, it will be remembered, was inaugurated at a dinner held on April 23rd, 1867, to celebrate the completion of the Crespin-Harding Pension, Mr. T. Scott being in the chair, on which occasion Sir Algernon Borthwick, Bart., M.P., expressed the pleasure it would afford him to inaugurate a "Drummond Pension" by subscribing the sum of fifty guineas. This subscription was supplemented by one of twenty-five guineas from H. L. W. Lawson, Esq., M.P., and within a few minutes about one hundred and thirty guineas was raised as a nucleus to the proposed new pension. The first Drummond Pensioner was elected in 1868, since which time an aged compositor has been annually elected, and an Association of subscribers formed for the purpose, among other things, of increasing the amount of the pension, or of founding an additional pension, as opportunity may offer. The primary object for which this special pension was founded having now been attained, it has been determined to celebrate the event by a dinner, at which the nobleman who inaugurated the pension (Lord Glenesk) has kindly consented to preside, F. J. E. Young, Esq. (Chairman of the Council of the Printers' Pension Corporation), having agreed to occupy the vice-chair. On the occasion of the dinner copies of the Drummond Pension Scheme, engrossed on vellum, will be presented by the Chairman of the Council to the President, Treasurer, and Hon. Secretaries of the Drummond Pension Association, in recognition of the services rendered by those gentlemen to the cause of charity, and it is believed that a highly successful gathering of the printing and allied trades will be assured. The number of tickets being necessarily limited, application should be made without delay to Messrs. Crespin and Mortimer, Hon. Secs., Falcon Hotel, Gough-square, Fleet-street.

a 'lengthy communication' from William Morris (not present) was also read out. John Dreyfus surmises that the images in this report were generated from Walker's slides and may therefore give some indication of those used in his previous lectures. However, there is little direct correlation between the report's text and its illustrations; consequently text, image and layout, as published here, achieve little didactic coherence. The report ends: '[a]t the conclusion of the lecture, a hearty vote of thanks was unanimously accorded to Mr Emery Walker, on the proposition of Dr William Garnett, seconded by Mr W. R. Lethaby, and the meeting terminated.'

Eminents observed Eric Kindel

between 1891 and 1896 embodied much that Walker had recommended.[8] Incunabular and sixteenth-century books provided models for new types and demonstrated the effective use of woodcut illustrations. The manufacture of Kelmscott books harmonized type, illustration, paper, printing and binding to produce objects whose visual and physical qualities were unique at the time.

The books of the Kelmscott Press, and the scheme of concerns that shaped them, reverberated in many quarters of Britain and in countries abroad, and are credited with reinvigorating contemporary printing and type design practices. They also spurred renewal in the sphere of education. By the mid 1890s, efforts begun some years earlier to improve technical education in various regions of England had gathered speed in London. Here the architect William Richard Lethaby played an important role. In 1894, Lethaby was appointed inspector to the Technical Education Board (TEB) of the London County Council (LCC), tasked with scrutinizing London art schools and advising on teaching practices. Two years later, the LCC opened a new art school, the Central School of Arts & Crafts, offering specialized study in the applied arts. On the strength of his work for the TEB, and with recommendations from William Morris, among others, Lethaby was appointed co-principal.[9]

At the Central School, Lethaby set out his programme of reform. He argued that training in technical education – the 'artistic trades' – should derive from workshop practice, in which tools and materials, rightly used, were crucial to design for present-day purposes. Historicism, design by rule and the dislocation of form from context were to be avoided. To this end, teaching was placed in the hands of practitioners who were masters of their craft. Under their supervision, students would engage in experimental work. The aim was to counteract the division of labour and knowledge by encouraging students 'to learn design and those branches of their craft which, owing to the sub-division of processes of production, they are unable to learn in the workshop.'[10] Evening students or those on 'day-release' from jobs elsewhere would engage with processes of design and making in their entirety, an opportunity often unavailable to them in their workplace.

In the sphere of printing and book production, Lethaby gradually built up the Central School's curriculum, beginning with bookbinding. Offerings in printing and book production probably owed much to Emery Walker, whose influence may be discerned in several respects. Before the Central School was opened, Lethaby would have been well acquainted with Walker's views on printing through the activities of the Art-Worker's Guild and its offshoot, the Arts & Crafts Exhibition Society (Lethaby was a founder member of both). The work of the Kelmscott Press would have been known to him also, since by the early 1890s Lethaby counted both Walker and Morris as professional friends. Walker and Lethaby had together advised on London's first specialist printing school, the Bolt Court Technical School, and after the Central School

opened Walker became one of its Governors. Moreover, Walker served as chairman on the LCC's committee on book production.[11]

While Walker's presence can be detected in the character of Central School classes in printing and book production, his influence may also be found in Lethaby's wish to introduce writing into the Central School's curriculum. In 1888, Walker had declared 'The moral is, if we want beautiful type, we must teach children to write beautifully'.[12] Lethaby may have also regarded writing as essential to understanding the origin and appropriate form of letters and types; writing was important in its own right, while claiming a wider significance for printing and typography. His decision to offer the subject soon after the Central School opened seems to at least confirm his recognition of its value.[13]

3

In April 1898, W. R. Lethaby asked Edward Johnston to teach a class in 'Illumination' (as it was first advertised) and this began in September the following year.[14] Despite the title of the class, Johnston's programme of teaching would focus on writing as its primary concern and illumination secondarily. The necessary revival of writing – a 'practically lost art' without commonly understood standards – should proceed by recovering the broad-edged pen as writing's principal source. Through a kind of practical archaeology, Johnston examined older forms of writing as vestiges of the pen's construction and deployment, then made letters anew, guided by his findings. As he would articulate some years later in *Writing & illuminating, & lettering* (1906), '[d]eveloping, or rather re-developing, an art involves *the tracing in one's own experience of a process resembling its past development*.'[15] Thus the re-development of writing would include both the intensive study of historical models and their practical re-creation in a contemporary idiom, an espousal of Walker's view that historical artefacts should guide present-day practice. 'And it is by such a course that we, who wish to revive Writing & Illuminating, may *renew* them, evolving new methods and traditions for ourselves, till at length we attain a modern and beautiful technique.' (p. xvi)

8. Morris's espousal of Walker's recommendations is found in their jointly authored essay, 'Printing' (1893). The essay is more polemical than Walker's own from five years earlier (see n. 5, above; Dreyfus attributes the change to Morris), and its discussions wider, encompassing matters such as word spacing, text colour, and the unity of the double-page spread, concerns central to work at the Kelmscott Press.

9. For details on technical education in London in the 1890s, and the roles played by Lethaby (and Walker), see Godfrey Rubens, 'W. R. Lethaby and the revival of printing', in *The Penrose Annual*, vol. 69 (London: Northwood Publications, 1976), pp. 219–32, and *W. R. Lethaby: his life and work 1857–1931* (London: The Architectural Press, 1986), pp. 173–98.

10. From an early prospectus of the Central School of Arts and Crafts, 1896. See also Stuart Evans, 'Teaching collections then and now,' *Object lessons: Central Saint Martins Art and Design Archive*, Sylvia Backemeyer (ed.) (London: Lund Humphries/The Lethaby Press, 1996), pp. 15–20. This book gathers together other essays on the early years of teaching at the Central School, cited below.

11. (2018) In his comments on this essay, Justin Howes recommended that I investigate the influence of Walker's associate, T. J. Cobden-Sanderson, on the Central School's curriculum. Like Walker, Cobden-Sanderson served as a Governor at the Central School; he was also secretary of the Arts & Crafts Exhibition Society. I have not been able to follow up this line of investigation.

12. Dreyfus, 'A reconstruction', p. 40.

13. (2018) In his comments on this essay, Justin Howes cautioned me against ascribing too much sophistication to Lethaby's views about writing at this time; cf. Lethaby's later (1906) preface to Edward Johnston's important handbook (discussed below).

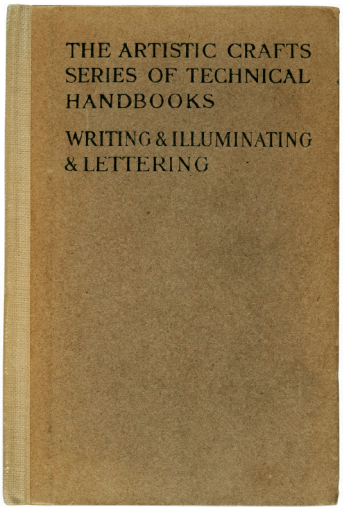
14. See Justin Howes, 'Edward Johnston's first class at the Central School on 21 September 1899', *Object lessons*, pp. 33–7. When asked by Lethaby to teach the class, Johnston thought himself hardly competent, and so spent the following year teaching himself.

15. Edward Johnston, *Writing & illuminating, & lettering* (London: John Hogg; 2nd edn, 1908), p. xvi. Quotations in this and the following two paragraphs are from this source; orthography and emphases as in the original.

If one examines *Writing & illuminating, & lettering*, this programme of learning by doing is embodied in the book's order and proportions (figures 2–6). The book quickly moves from an historical overview of letterforms (a single chapter) to the practical skills of making (the following twelve). Only then are theoretical issues of letterfrom construction dealt with. The priority is active writing, which Johnston considered the essence of the craft and its instruction. The goal was not only 'to take the best letters we can find, and to acquire them *and make them our own*' (p. xix), but to pursue this with an aim that was also practical in outlook. '[T]he independent craftsman would have to establish himself by *useful* practice, and by seizing opportunities, and by doing his work well. Only an attempt to do practical work will raise practical problems, and therefore *useful practice is the making of real or definite things*.' (pp. xxi–xxii)[16]

Johnston's concern both for making and 'making one's own' meant that he often revisited the relationship between the practice of writing and its models. The models Johnston recommended were several: the Roman square capital – 'The ancestor of all our letters ... in undisputed possession of the first place' (p. 238) – and its pen-formed capital and small-letter relatives, the latter including uncials, half-uncials and his (later) Carolingian-derived 'Foundational Hand'. But the practice of writing needed to approach the work of recovery with care. Models should not be slavishly imitated or humbly copied. Instead, their regeneration must be dynamic, beginning with the perception of a model's 'essential form', on which was built the '*character and finish which come naturally from a rightly handled tool*.' (p. 240)[17] A useful, even hard-working letter was the first criterion that should be satisfied in the present day, not mere obedience to forms located in the historical past. Thus: '*On copying a Hand*.—Our intentions being right (viz. to make our work essentially readable) and our actions being expedient (viz. to select and copy the simple forms which have remained essentially the same, leaving the complex forms which have passed out of use ...) we need not vex ourselves with the question of "lawfulness."' (p. 323)

Sample alphabets of any kind were regarded similarly. Those Johnston provided to his students were often described as freely copied, and were accompanied by annotations encouraging variations in form, shape, proportion, detail and combination. He was intent on discouraging the temptation to regard them as final forms (see figures 7 and 8, overleaf). There were good reasons to avoid doing so. Sample alphabets were themselves removed from the vitality of writing: 'if an Alphabet is written as a Specimen it is primarily a Specimen Alphabet (& is debarred from the natural Freedom or run of free Writing).'[18] They were also removed from true writing by the fact of their mechanical reproduction; and the impulse to 'touch-up' and perfect letters for publication threatened to further deprive them of those 'varieties, differences, faults – wh. are not real faults in Free Writing'. So the danger lay not only in the 'crystallizations' of letterforms through 'slavish' copying but in the



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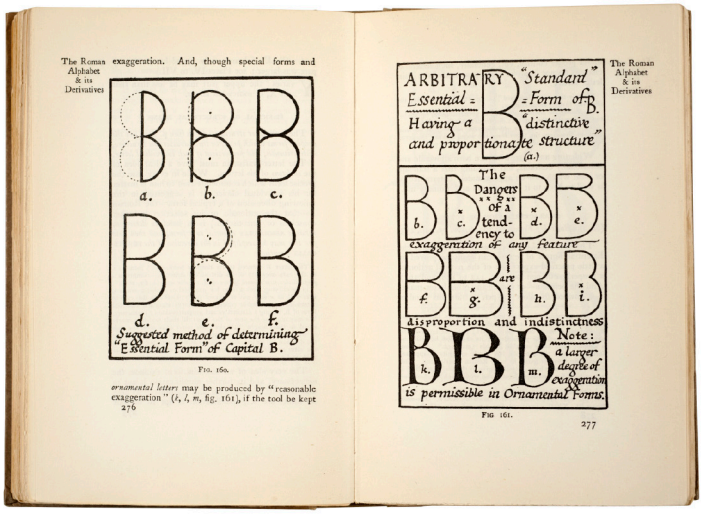
Figures 2–6. Edward Johnston, *Writing & illuminating, & lettering* (1906; 2nd edn, 1908, shown here), cover and inside pages, 182 x 120 mm (page). Sequence of diagrams illustrating essential forms and their role in constructing letters whose specific attributes were determined by the broad-edged pen (figures 3, 4). Additional lists and diagrams give an inventory of attributes found in Roman letters (figures 5, 6). These diagrams occur in the book's more analytical second part. Here (chapters 14 and 15) letterforms are dismantled and their parts described in detail.

Johnston created many diagrams for *Writing & illuminating, & lettering,* some of great inventiveness. Their success lies in their ability to demonstrate and summarize concepts and procedures with great precision. While Johnston, with his idiosyncratic flair (and compulsion) for annotation, typically integrated textual notes, the diagrams also function on a purely visual level, and can be understood solely through looking and seeing.

Despite their ingenuity, Johnston was nevertheless concerned that the diagrams should not obscure the proper aim of writing and lettering: 'it is rather as a stimulus to definite thought – not as an embodiment of hard and fast rules – that various methodical plans & tables of comparison & analysis are given in this book. It is well to recognize at once, the fact that the mere taking to pieces, or analysing, followed by "putting together," is only a means of becoming acquainted with the mechanism of construction, and will not reproduce the original beauty of the thing' (p. xxi).



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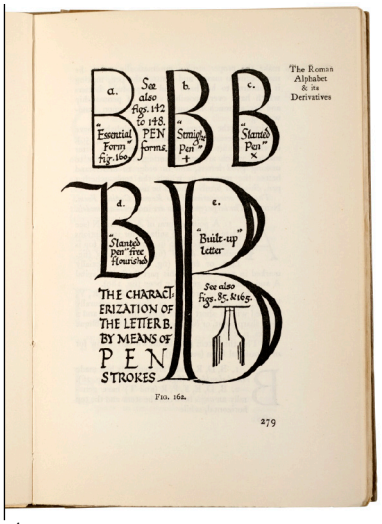

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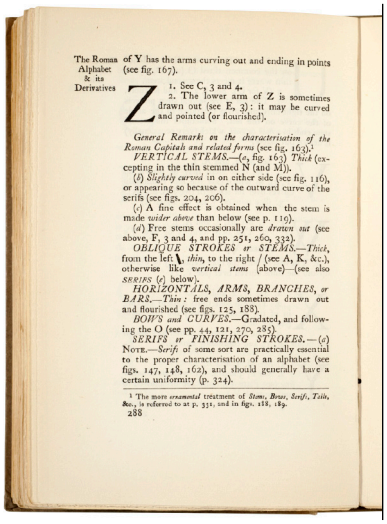

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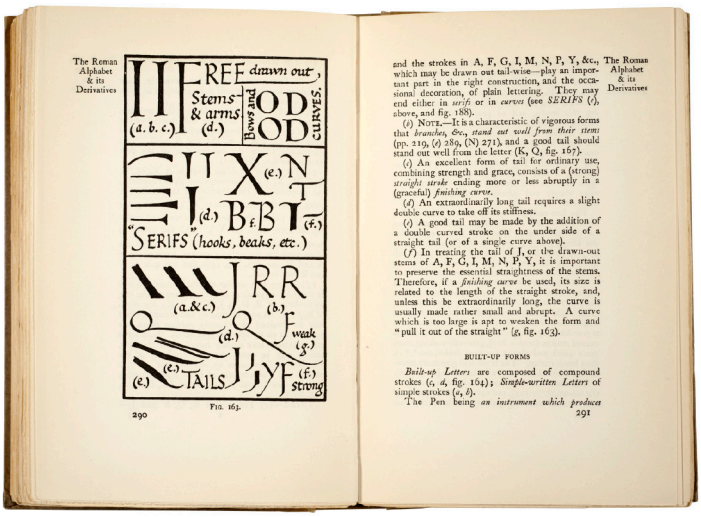

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16. This priority remained key to Johnston's view of writing thoughout his working life. In a letter many years later describing progress on a successor to *Writing & illuminating, & lettering,* Johnston pondered both making and how it might be taught: 'Perhaps you know, perhaps not, how long I have puzzled over the question at what point in my Book and how much (and how expressed) should I reveal the vital factors in Formal Penmanship. It is a kind of paradox of Teaching or Learning – To know how to make Things you must make them – ("practising" teaches you how to practise – or rather how to do practising) but the student cannot make things (we say) until he has learnt how to make them. The solution (of How, then, does he learn?) is found in the theorem ... Achilles cannot cross a Room, for before he crosses r he must cross r/2 and before he crosses the remaining r/2 he must cross r/2/2 and so on, leaving a fraction to be crossed. The answer may be found in the fact that Achilles does actually cross it, or, in the Act itself'. Edward Johnston, *Formal penmanship and other papers* (London: Lund Humphries, and New York: Hastings House, 1971), p. 11.

17. For Johnston the implied tool was almost always the broad-edged pen. But he also made plain that the symbiosis of essential forms and a rightly-handled tool was applicable in many writing and lettering contexts.

18. Quotations in this paragraph from Edward Johnston, *Lessons in formal writing* (London: Lund Humphries, 1986), p. 134, recorded in his 'vellum-bound notebook' (not dated).

Eminents observed Eric Kindel

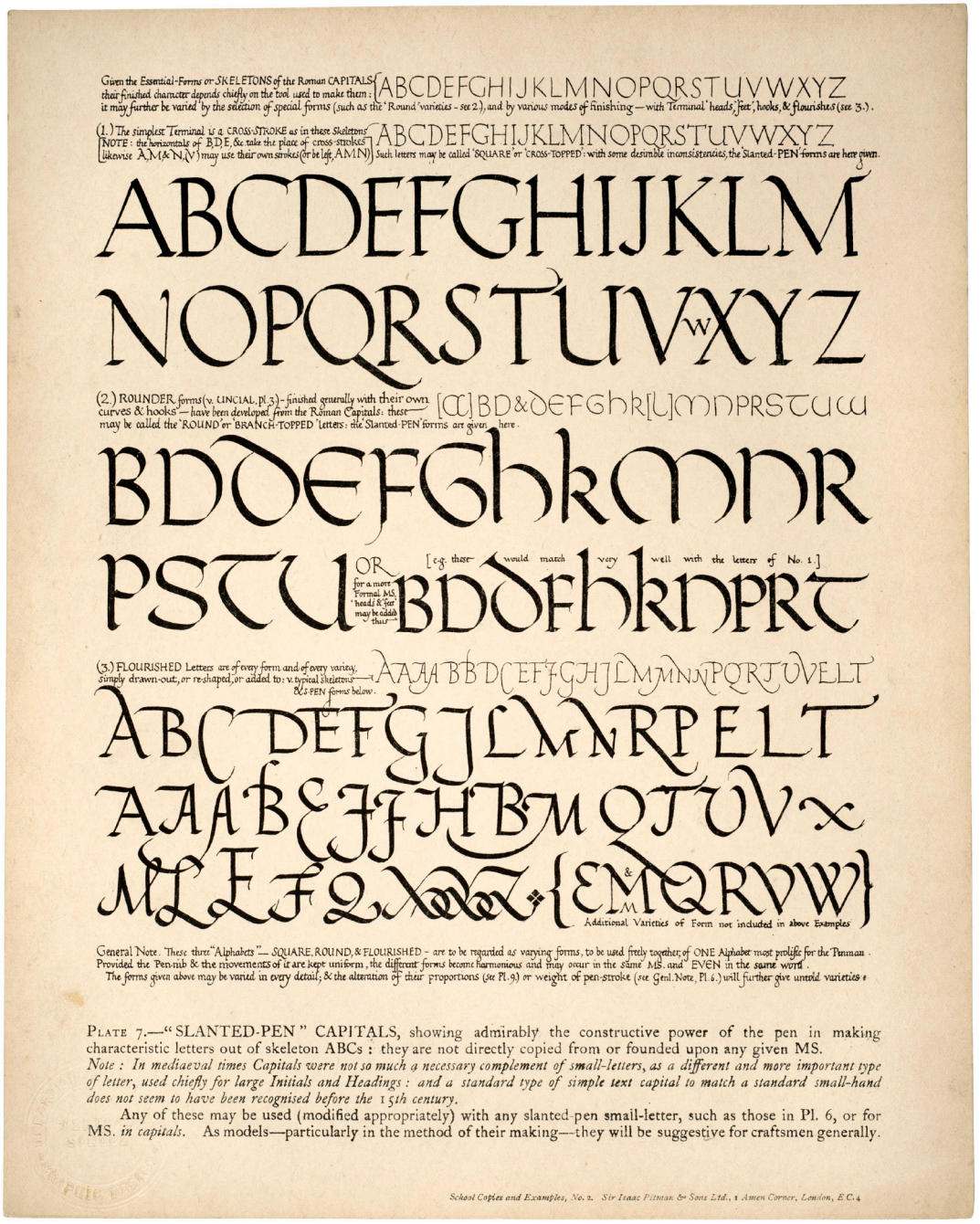


Figure 7. Edward Johnston, *Manuscript & inscription letters* (1909). '"Slanted-pen" capitals', plate 7 (of 16; illustrations for plates 12–16 by Eric Gill), 315 x 250 mm. The concept of 'Essential-Forms' (or skeletons) is demonstrated with three variants of Roman capitals made with a broad-edged pen. Each variant shows progressive elaborations until 'letters are of every form and of every variety.' Models illustrated in plates 2–7 are then shown in plates 8–16 in different contexts: as alternative pen forms (see figure 8, opposite), as wood-engraved letters or printing type (Caslon Old Face), and as stone-carved letters. *Manuscript & inscription letters* was published three years after *Writing & illuminating, & lettering*, and summarized the class sheets and notes Johnston distributed to his students. He emphasized even more frequently than in his book that alphabets should be *freely* copied and altered to ensure variety and spirit (see 'General Note' in this figure, above). Johnston stated in the portfolio's introduction that in extracting these models from manuscripts, he had himself copied them freely, leaving the results unretouched for reproduction in order to 'betray … to the *student* not only the forms, but the actual manner of their construction.'

removal of writing's 'natural breaks and roughnesses' that revealed the act of writing and the presence of the writer. Literal reproduction – in several senses – discouraged or disguised the uniqueness of handwritten words and thereby inhibited both freedom in creating them and truthfulness in conveying their essential qualities.

Given Johnston's concern for the immediacy of writing, it is appropriate to consider his classroom teaching as an apt expression of his published pronouncements. By all accounts Johnston was a gifted teacher: reminiscences suggest a presence that surprised and engaged. Seemingly introspective, retiring, even cryptic at first, these impressions were soon dispelled by his clarity of speech and line of inquiry that alternated between direct and discursive. Though Johnston was notoriously inefficient over the syllabus tick-list, for his audience it was a lively process of revelation. His manner and method were made graphic by the act of writing, which often occurred at the blackboard. Here, he would use the long side of a piece of chalk to emulate the strokes of a broad-edged pen. Repetition played an essential role: letterforms would be written, analysed and revised as differences in form and execution were noted and evaluated. Throughout, Johnston's writing was amplified by expansive movements that produced letters whose large scale vividly illustrated their form, proportion and construction.[19]

In different ways, the artefacts of Johnston's teaching are an echo of it. His handbook, the portfolio of class-sheets, surviving photographs of blackboard demonstrations, and his notebooks are all detailed graphic explorations that begin with the writing, which is then analysed through lists, diagrams, annotations and cross-references. The orthography of the texts is often speech-like: (typo)graphic pauses, alignments and stresses suggest the shifts and interventions of verbal delivery. The artefacts are conversational and provisional, encouraging the student to action and, where necessary, contesting the fact of their mechanical reproduction. And the conversations they preserve are vestiges of those Johnston conducted with himself, his qualifications and admonitions turning the artefacts against themselves as they are subjected to critical analysis. That this aligns with reminiscences of Johnston's habit of mind and practice suggests that such artefacts are true and natural, expressing an animated presence that continues to instruct in his absence.

Figure 8. Edward Johnston, *Manuscript & inscription letters* (1909). 'Pen-made Roman capitals', plate 9, 315 x 250 mm.

4

By 1912, both Edward Johnston and W. R. Lethaby had left the Central School for the Royal College of Art, where each had been already teaching part-time. Before his resignation, Lethaby had succeeded in drawing together related areas of study. This is evident in the design of a new building in Southampton Row, occupied by the Central School in 1908. Purpose-built to a brief drawn up by Lethaby, it grouped together allied disciplines. Those related to the book were located on one floor and formed a School of Book Production. Lethaby enlarged its teaching

19. A number of evocations by former students, associates and colleagues were published in *Lessons in formal writing*, among them Noel Rooke and Violet Hawkes. 'At the first sight of him, although his hands could be seen to be capable, sensitive and strong, the general impression was one of lassitude, of physical strength drained right out. Then he spoke. The clearness and vigour of his mind came as a shock, a delight.' (Rooke, p. 48) 'To watch him at work on the board was an education in itself. The easy, swinging rhythm of his strokes was unhurried and unhesitating, like the movements of an accomplished skater, combining perfect control with perfect freedom.' (Hawkes, p. 146).

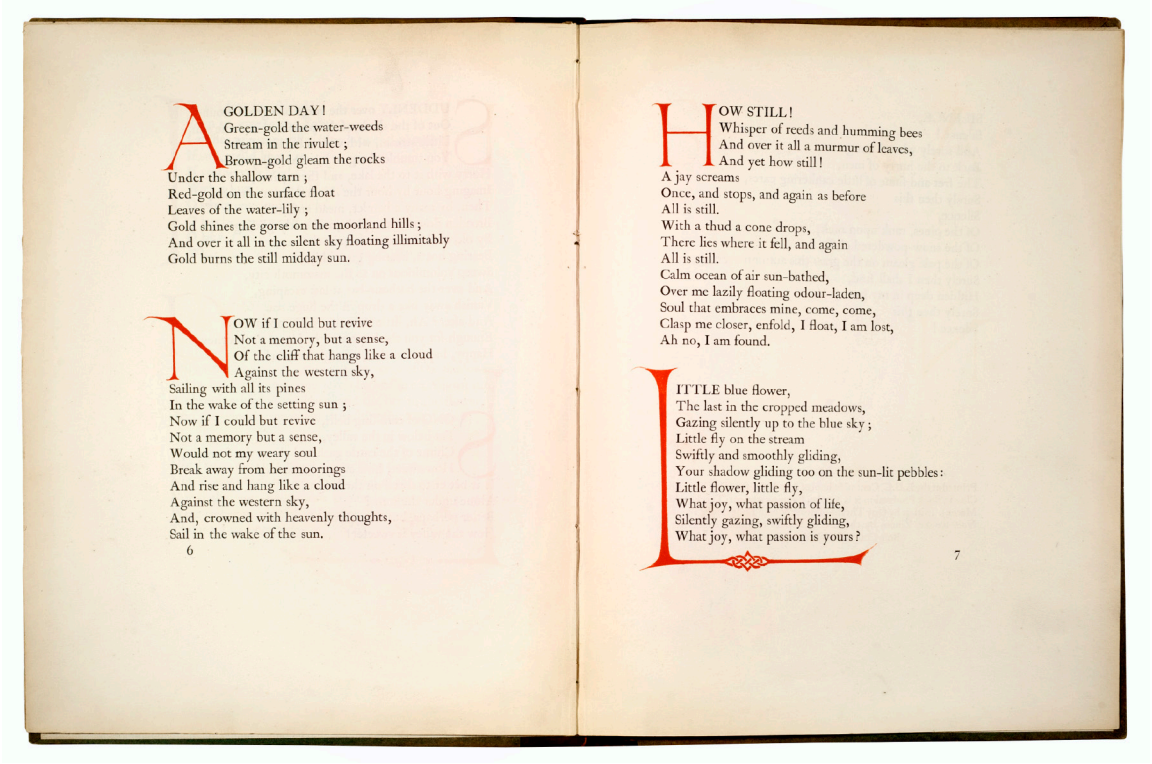
Eminents observed Eric Kindel

staff by appointing Noel Rooke and John Henry Mason. Rooke taught wood engraving, which he regarded as well-suited to book illustration; it played an important part in his classes in 'black & white' design, book illustration and poster design. Mason assumed responsibility for typography and printing. Mason was fresh from the Doves Press where he had served an apprenticeship under Emery Walker and T. J. Cobden-Sanderson, immersed in the principles of the private press movement.[20] Among those already on the Central School staff was Graily Hewitt; he, like Rooke, had been a student of Johnston's and he began teaching a second class in writing and illuminating in 1903.

The establishment of the School of Book Production marks the beginning of a period of remarkable continuity in the teaching of book production subjects that would extend into the 1940s. This continuity may be explained both by the enduring force of Lethaby's programme of technical education, and by the lengthy tenures of Rooke, Mason and Hewitt, whose firmly held and forceful views on teaching would dominate the book production curriculum through the decades. Their views were conservative by nature; that is to say, they espoused Lethaby's concern that craft work be preserved as the core of technical education, then adapted to industrial circumstances. The will to preserve was especially strong in the teaching of Mason and Hewitt.[21]

While risking the obvious, it is worth reiterating that teaching in the School of Book Production revolved to a large extent around *the book*, a place where several disciplines could be brought together and understood in union. If instruction was principally concerned with training apprentices for the printing trade, it nevertheless focused on book work of 'the highest type', modelled on the English private presses and explicitly distinct from advertising or indeed most trade book printing. As Mason wrote of his teaching at this time, 'the aim was to apply the lessons learned by the research and experiment of the great private presses, to technical training'.[22] For him, books from the Doves Press, in their austere richness, embodied many of the principles he valued. His teaching, in turn, enlisted a similar discipline and quality.[23] Discipline was especially evident in the role he assigned to type and typography. Here, typographic expression was circumscribed in deference to the unified book-object where all parts were harmonious and none dominant. This approach also dignified the scholarly texts Mason frequently recommended for student projects. Where type was concerned, the choice was generally Caslon Old Face.[24] The results thus evoked the atmosphere of private press books and the Central School became well known for work of this kind (figure 9). And, like those of the private presses, books made in the School of Book Production sat some distance from the sphere of trade printing where the standards of manufacture were almost always of a different order.

Despite Mason's emphasis on the finely made book, the concerns of trade printing did not go unaddressed. In 1913, the Central School



A GOLDEN DAY!
Green-gold the water-weeds
Stream in the rivulet ;
Brown-gold gleam the rocks
Under the shallow tarn ;
Red-gold on the surface float
Leaves of the water-lily ;
Gold shines the gorse on the moorland hills ;
And over it all in the silent sky floating illimitably
Gold burns the still midday sun.

NOW if I could but revive
Not a memory, but a sense,
Of the cliff that hangs like a cloud
Against the western sky,
Sailing with all its pines
In the wake of the setting sun ;
Now if I could but revive
Not a memory but a sense,
Would not my weary soul
Break away from her moorings
And rise and hang like a cloud
Against the western sky,
And, crowned with heavenly thoughts,
Sail in the wake of the sun.

6

HOW STILL!
Whisper of reeds and humming bees
And over it all a murmur of leaves,
And yet how still!
A jay screams
Once, and stops, and again as before
All is still.
With a thud a cone drops,
There lies where it fell, and again
All is still.
Calm ocean of air sun-bathed,
Over me lazily floating odour-laden,
Soul that embraces mine, come, come,
Clasp me closer, enfold, I float, I am lost,
Ah no, I am found.

LITTLE blue flower,
The last in the cropped meadows,
Gazing silently up to the blue sky ;
Little fly on the stream
Swiftly and smoothly gliding,
Your shadow gliding too on the sun-lit pebbles:
Little flower, little fly,
What joy, what passion of life,
Silently gazing, swiftly gliding,
What joy, what passion is yours?

7

Figure 9. G[oldsworthy]. Lowes Dickinson, *A Wild Rose & other poems* (1910), 275 x 215 mm (page). J. H. Mason had studied the work of the Cambridge scholar Lowes Dickinson and had maintained a long-standing friendship with him, and suggested printing an edition of his occasional poems in the School of Book Production. Two editions were eventually published, one designed by Mason, a second produced by students (shown above). (Both, incidentally, are mentioned in E. M. Forster's 1934 biography, *Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson*.) The student-produced book typifies the kind of collaboration that took place in the School of Book Production: its typographic design and printing were carried out under Mason's guidance, while the initials were cut with instruction from Noel Rooke (cf. figure 8, p. 61). Books made in Mason's classes at this time were similar to those of the Doves Press in their simplicity of design and their lack of illustration or typographical contrast. In this example, emphasis is laid on the basics: the relationship of text area to margins, the relationship of type size to page size, the evenness of text 'colour', and the unity of the spread of pages, in which each column of type forms a rectangle by means of its precise imposition on the column that shows through from the reverse, giving the spread symmetrical coherence. The exaggerated serifs of the initials and the woven stroke of the 'L' are the only concessions to decoration in an otherwise carefully restrained production.

20. Mason's appointment at the Central School in 1905 was initially part-time, while he continued work at the Doves Press. He took charge of printing and typography in the School of Book Production full-time in 1909. His appointment was warmly endorsed by both Walker and Cobden-Sanderson. Mason was a trade compositor by training (having left school at 13), though he was scholarly by inclination and had done much to advance his own education, notably in classical literature and languages. After some years in the printing trade, he was taken on at the Doves Press, which he later described (in a letter of 1941) as 'a new and beautiful world after commercial work because of its deliberate choice of only the finest standards.' L. T. Owens, *J. H. Mason, 1875–1951, scholar-printer* (London: Frederick Muller, 1976), p. 172.

21. While observations below focus on the views of Mason and Hewitt, Noel Rooke offered an alternative, freer, approach to letterforms as used for posters, book jackets and other kinds of display.

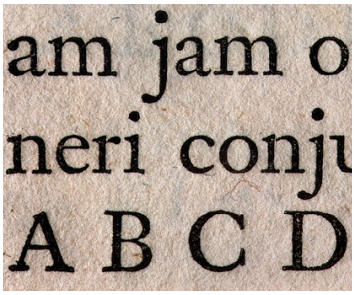
22. Prospectus, Central School of Arts and Crafts, 1928. A similar statement appears in Mason's pamphlet, *Notes on printing considered as an industrial art* (London: The British Institute of Industrial Art, 1926).

23. Mason's experiences at the Doves Press encouraged the view that printing and typography should seek the highest expression of learning and culture, a view he espoused throughout his career. In 1931, Noel Rooke said of the Doves Press influence on Mason: 'Walker and Cobden-Sanderson revealed to him whole constellations of new heavens of printing, and of the literature it had come into existence to serve. Soon, nothing in printing, short of the best that could exist, would satisfy him. Anything that was derogatory or hindered the search for perfection was an offence.' Quoted in Owens, *J. H. Mason*, p. 39.

24. The suggestion to acquire Caslon Old Face for the School of Book Production was apparently made by Emery Walker. As it had for a number of private presses lacking custom types of their own, Caslon Old Face provided Mason with an English type of distinguished pedigree in a range of sizes. In recommending types for study, he stated: '*First of all* Caslon Old Face. The design is based on the Dutch romans, and with that touch of genius so often seen in the work of our race, Caslon has embodied the English tradition in his instinctive modifications of the Continental type. He has made a gentleman of a sloven.' J. H. Mason, 'Essay on printing' (Arts & Crafts Exhibition Society, 1944), quoted in Owens, *J. H. Mason*, pp. 51–2.

prospectus listed mechanical type composition and methods of process reproduction (three-colour, halftone and line work) as among the subjects Mason covered, while newspapers and advertising were also discussed. Little evidence appears to survive of the application of processes found in trade printing, though a contemporary, bound volume does gather together small advertisements composed by students and set mostly in Caslon Old Face.[25] But 1913 was important in another, related way: that year *The Imprint* magazine was launched. Written, edited and produced mainly by staff at the Central School (Mason served as a co-editor and contributing writer), it sought to promote new and different standards for trade printing in general, and periodicals in particular. As a printed artefact, *The Imprint* did demonstrate that high standards need not be confined to the private presses. This was especially true of the magazine's typography, which employed a new type, Imprint Old Face. The design was instigated by Mason, and was related to William Caslon's Great Primer Roman. It was expertly customized by its manufacturer, the Lanston Monotype Corporation, to the requirements of mechanical type composition and to the hard smooth papers then common in trade printing. The type served its utilitarian remit with notable success and illustrated the benefits of industrial and craft collaboration.

The Imprint, however, was short-lived, running for just nine issues. The magazine probably did encourage improvements in trade printing, while at the same time reinforcing Mason's contention that private press printing was the most relevant guide for the betterment of the trade. This view is evident in articles and reviews Mason contributed to *The Imprint*, which sometimes expressed impatience with commercial print and reproduction. The perfection of means and expression he valued were elusive in the less refined regions of printing where other imperatives – scale, speed, profit – dominated the work and required compromises that Mason was loathe to countenance. In the School of Book Production, emphasis remained for the most part on fine (book) printing as the point of departure. Curricula in successive prospectuses changed little from one year to the next, while the character of the books produced early in Mason's tenure persisted in later years, if more frequently embellished with wood-engraved illustration. The principle at work remained one of diffusion: that the craft of printing should flow from the private presses though technical education into the trade, carried there by the spread of students' skills. This assumption of cause and effect helped Mason define his means and materials, but it also ensured that many other applications of printing and typography, and the broader range of visual and technical expression they might require, would remain comparatively insignificant in his teaching.[26]



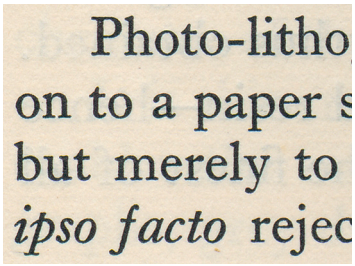


Figure 10. William Caslon I, Great Primer Roman (c. 1728), as shown in Caslon's broadsheet specimen of 1734.
Figure 11. Imprint Old Face (1912–13), as shown in *The Imprint* (1913).

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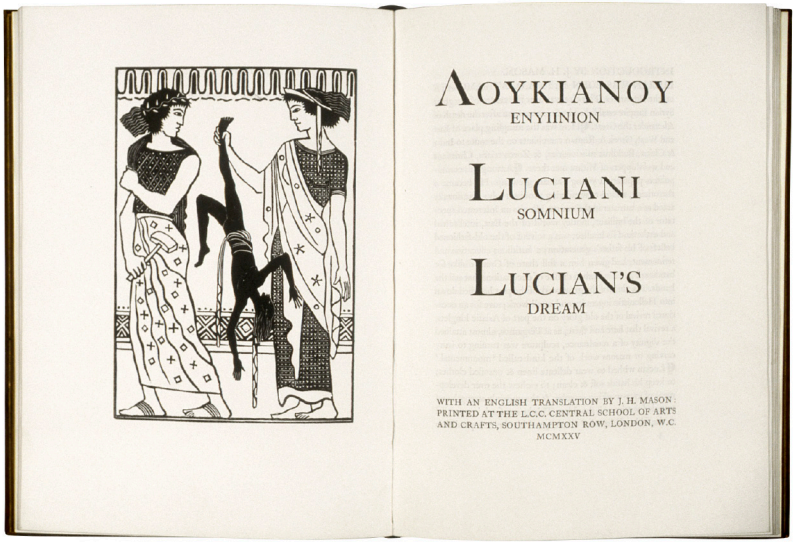
In the character of his teaching, Graily Hewitt had much in common with J. H. Mason. As mentioned, Hewitt had been a student of Edward



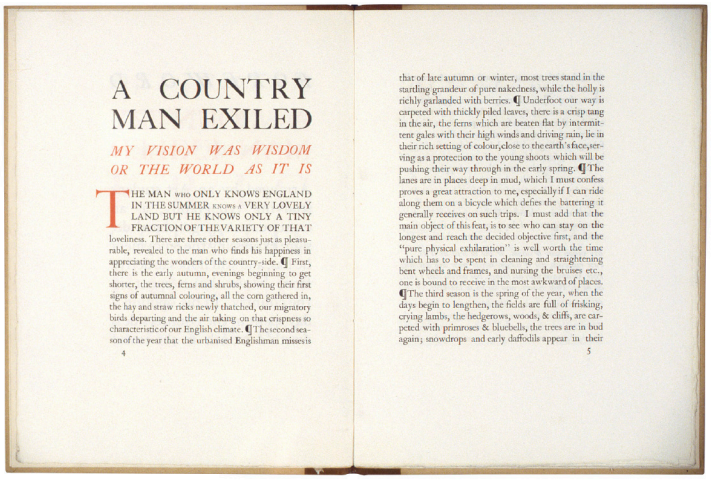


Figure 12. *Lucian's dream*, School of Book Production, Central School of Arts & Crafts, London (1925). English and ancient Greek composed in Caslon Old Face, Greek translation by J. H. Mason. 282 x 210 mm (page). Woodcut by Frederica Graham (Noel Rooke, instructor); type composition by J. J. Andron (J. H. Mason, instructor).
Figure 13. *A country man exiled*, School of Book Production, Central School of Arts & Crafts, London (1938). Compiled and illustrated by Reeve L. Johnson. 260 x 195 mm (page).

These examples illustrate typical literary material selected for student projects, to which Mason often made scholarly contributions. Together with figure 9 (p. 63, above), they suggest the continuity of typographic expression found in Mason's workshops over the years. Writing in 1946, after his retirement, Mason made plain those principles he valued in typography, principles resonating with the concerns that Emery Walker had outlined many years before: 'Typography has first a beauty of letterform, from this we create a beauty of texture by word spacing and line spacing; from this we proceed to a beauty of proportion in planning a type area, in deciding the width of line in relation to the type, and depth of page in relation to the line, and then relating the margins to the printed page. Initial letters, or words or lines or masses, mark the exordium of the work and of its parts and afford the printer an opportunity for enthusiasm. A similar enthusiasm seizes the opportunity for illustration, or emphasis, but always in a strictly typographical mode. All this is to be realized in an atmosphere of loving technique. THIS IS HOW A FINE BOOK IS MADE.' 'Typography: a printer's philosophy', *Fifteen craftsmen on their crafts*, p. 59, capitalization in the original.

25. *School of Book Production & Printing, specimens of general jobbing advertisement & table work …* (London: London County Council, Central School of Arts & Crafts, 1914).
26. Mason's approach may be additionally characterized by his recommendation that Edward Prince, who had cut many private press types including the Doves Press roman, initiate a class in hand punchcutting. This was begun in 1914, immediately after the demise of *The Imprint*. Elsewhere, the lessons of Imprint Old Face seemingly played little role in Mason's teaching. While its success as an adaptation designed for the requirements of mechanical type composition suggest an engagement with up-to-date concerns, students were mostly set to work drawing the typeforms of Caslon Old Face as a prelude to that type's near-exclusive use in practical studies. Both instances reaffirm the Central School's aim to revive or preserve crafts whose relevance to modern industrial production was not always self-evident.

Johnston's and subsequently began his own course in writing and illuminating at the Central School. During these years he formed a close friendship with Johnston and the two were occasional collaborators, most notably when Hewitt supplied an appendix on gilding to *Writing & illuminating, & lettering*. Hewitt's teaching followed that of his mentor in asserting the broad-edged pen as the source of writing and lettering. The applications of writing were title pages, notices, documents and addresses, while the form of the book set the 'traditional and conventional standard' for much of writing's visual expression. Like Mason, Hewitt's approach remained remarkably consistent during his years at the Central School. In 1930, when he retired, the description for his course was little changed from 1903, and the influence of Johnston's ideas remained undiminished. But in Hewitt's teaching there was a difference of emphasis on the proper role of writing, and this set him apart from Johnston in a number of important ways. The differences are perhaps best seen in two books Hewitt completed in close succession towards the end of his career.

The first was *The pen and type-design*, published to announce Treyford, a new typeface Hewitt had designed; the book was a type specimen in the mode of fine printing.[27] In it, Hewitt stated that Treyford was 'an attempt to represent our printed letter-forms with due regard to their creation by the pen and their adaptation for the use of the machine, and further to their conformations in our language.' (p. 31) Treyford was thus a rendition of Hewitt's writing with a broad-edged pen, adapted to mechanical type composition. His rationale for the design sprang from the pen's mediation of the forms of letters over many centuries. This encouraged a direct, even literal, translation of pen-formed letters into metal type. The goal was legibility, authorized by the historical conventions of writing.[28] In the preface to *The pen and type-design*, Hewitt also took the opportunity to disparage advertising's 'graphic bawl' as typified by 'block letters' (sans serifs), whose insensitive forms and aggressive deployment were, he asserted, a corruption of letters.[29]

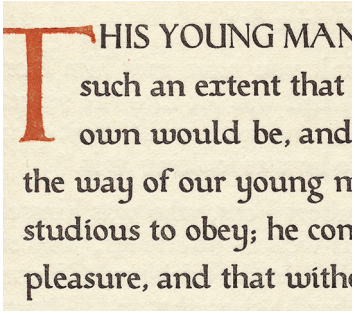


Figure 14. Treyford, designed by Graily Hewitt (1928), as shown in *Matrix 13* (1993).

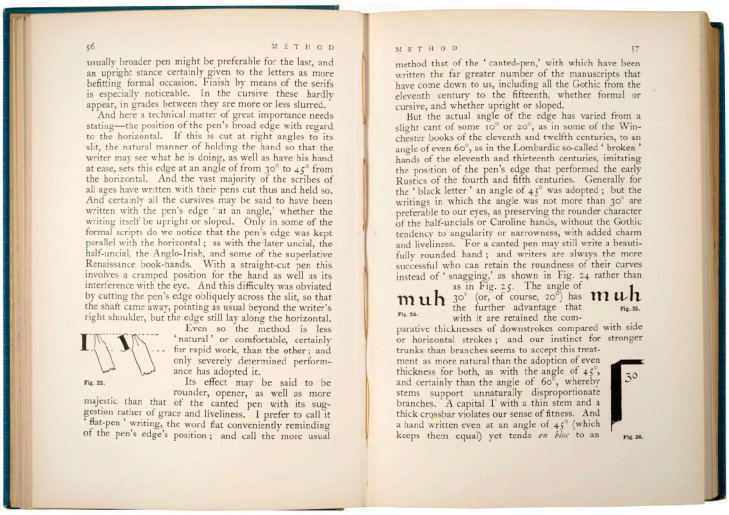
Hewitt's second book, *Lettering*, was published two years later and summarized his practice and teaching of formal writing.[30] The book would not be like Johnston's; Hewitt felt that *Writing & illuminating, & lettering* was unsurpassed in its usefulness and he did not, anyway, wish to give his own thoughts this form. 'All who are interested in lettering are acquainted with Edward Johnston's classic. To him, as my first teacher, I owe more than most. This book [i.e. *Lettering*] represents a point of view and a settled policy in regard to writing, with reasons for the choice. Any restatement of familiar matter or figure is here only employed where the clarity and continuity of my observations or modifications have seemed to me to call for it.' Hewitt's approach, his 'settled policy', made *Lettering* treatise-like, less concerned with practical making than with the theoretical bases of writing and lettering. In tone and style, his writing was stern and occasionally sententious.

The introduction to *Lettering* begins with a summary of the forces and pressures exerted by advertising and publicity, and that Hewitt detected at work in the field of writing and lettering. Here, as in *The pen and type-design*, he detected anatagonisms between the accumulated conventions of legibility and good taste, and the concerns of commerce:

> For some years past serious endeavour has been directed towards the improvement of writing – our alphabet's technique. Our lives are littered with lettering, our walls plastered with it, our skies ablaze with it. We have imagined this more endurable if better done. But in considering the bettering of it we have taken certain standards too much for granted, without weighing their applicability to our modern purposes; and are now becoming aware that too often they are inadequate. We have presumed that the scholar and the artist, and now the scientist, are fit judges for the essentially legible. We have overlooked the advertiser. His legibility is not always theirs. If refinement may assist his purpose, which is to sell something, well. But that he catch your eye is the important point. Advertisement is competitive. Exceptionally a quiet sobriety may attract notice in a noisy crowd, but only so long as isolated by singularity. If all our lettering, crowded as it is, were 'in good taste', it would fail commercially. For the essence of advertisement is to compel attention. The lettering must assist this – somehow. The classic style does not admit this premise. How, then, can we improve our commercial lettering by reference to classic standards? The question must be answered by reference to other than these. It is being so answered.[31]

This passage is notable for setting out the issues Hewitt found most vexacious in writing and lettering. Oddly, he appears forward-looking at first in his acceptance that other standards of form and legibility were required for commerce, standards other than those of the scholar, the artist and the scientist of letters. But Hewitt's seemingly pragmatic disposition is, in fact, shot through with disdain for advertising's simple and blunt requirements. He readily admits that the 'good taste' of the classic style is largely irrelevant in such circumstances, and it becomes clear that Hewitt's underlying concern is not with advertising, but rather that the classic style has little place in its operations. As such, advertising is regrettable: its crass pervasiveness crowds out alternatives in good taste, its distortions and exaggerations – the 'noisy crowd' – attack

27. Graily Hewitt, *The pen and type-design* (London: The First Edition Club, 1928). The book was bound in red morocco with gilt decoration; it was printed on Barcham Green hand-made paper in an edition of 250 copies.
28. Hewitt's line of reasoning was rebutted by Stanley Morison, who reviewed *The pen and type-design* in the seventh issue of *The Fleuron*. Morison accused Hewitt of ignoring the conventions of typography by asserting the priority of written forms in type-making and printing, thereby discounting what Morison considered the more formative contributions of engraving, i.e. the work of the punchcutter. 'Mr Hewitt therefore is not, in our opinion, welcome to dismiss the printer as a mere corrupt imitator of the more highly endowed scribe.' Morison, 'The Treyford type', *The Fleuron*, no. 7 (London: Cambridge University Press, 1930) pp. 180–5. For a digest of this episode and the process of Treyford's design that preceeded it, see Peter Foden, 'John Johnson and the Treyford type', *Matrix 13* (Whittington: The Whittington Press, 1993), pp. 62–72.
29. Block letters, commercial and utilitarian, ignored 'that prime element of beauty (as of scholarship) in lettercraft,– contrast of thick and thin strokes, and the regular gradation from one to the other in the curves'. Hewitt, *The pen and type-design*, p. 31. Hewitt returned to the subject of block letters in other publications and in private correspondence (see n. 34, below).
30. Graily Hewitt, *Lettering for students and craftsmen* (London: Seeley Service, 1930). The book was published in a specially bound limited edition that included several original alphabets written by Hewitt, and as a cloth-bound trade edition in a paper wrapper, with no additional matter.
31. Hewitt, *Lettering*, pp. 17–18.



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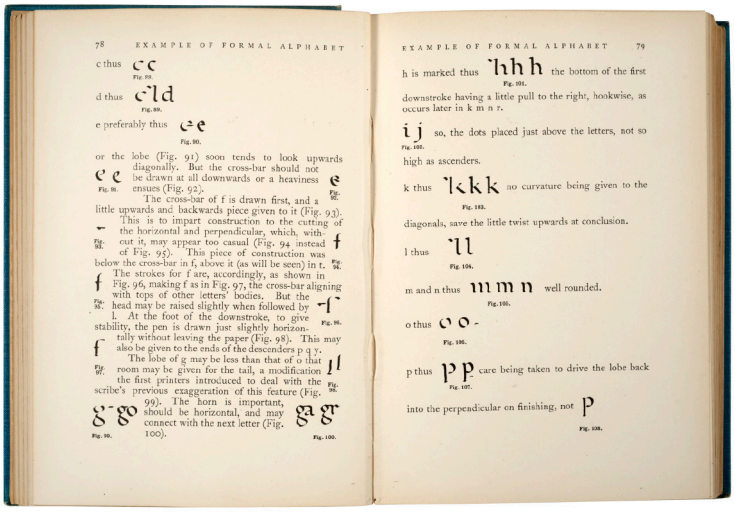

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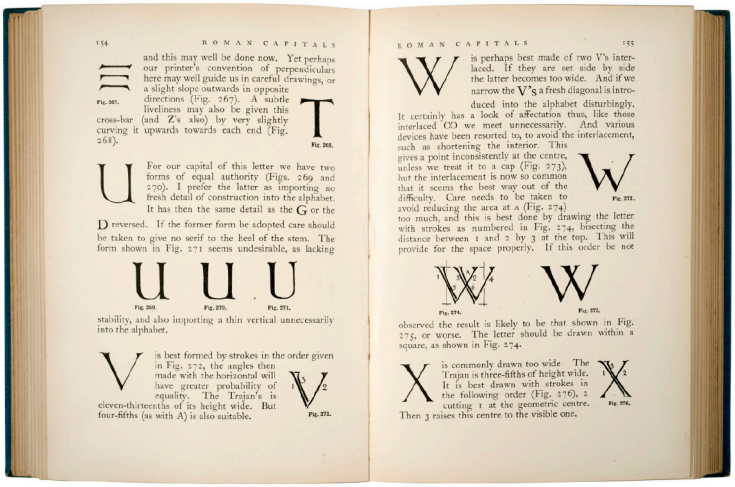

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Figures 15–17. Grail Hewitt, *Lettering for students and craftsmen* (1930), spreads from trade edition, 197 x 135 mm (page). For Hewitt, as for Johnston before him, the broad-edged pen is the stated basis of letterform construction. Unlike his mentor, however, Hewitt grants far less importance to 'essential forms'; instead (roman) letters should follow no more than a general convention of stroke placement. Thereafter the letterform is determined by the characteristics of the pen. To accept that essential forms underlie roman letters is, to Hewitt, an espousal in principle of 'block' letters, which, unmediated by the broad-edged pen, are a contravention of its standard.

Hewitt's views meant that the letterforms he illustrates in *Lettering* are predominantly those formed by the broad-edged pen, in most instances shown at the same size as written to avoid any exaggeration of effect. The result is less demonstration through image – understanding by *seeing* – and rather more discourse through text. The integration of illustration and text, especially at sentence level (figure 16), offers coherence but of a kind facilitated mainly through reading. In general, the visual expression of *Lettering* is circumspect. Where the pages of Johnston's manual convey the act, energy and diversity of making, Hewitt's presentation is by comparison constrained and often monotonous, despite its strongly and consistently argued 'policy'.

valuable conventions by encouraging a new legibility determined merely by competitiveness. Despite the fitness for purpose that some (un-named) letterforms possessed in the service of commercial ends, it remained the grotesqueries of 'the competitive standard' that precluded more sensitive solutions.

While Hewitt suggested, in general terms, changes in the conduct of advertising to make way for more 'civil intercourse', he clearly recognized the difficulty of such reform. Here, he again echoed his colleague Mason by voicing interest in the variety of his displine while at the same time avoiding direct contact with practices whose means were considered impure. Thus in his second chapter, 'The pen's standard', Hewitt left behind the complexities and vagaries of lettering that he began with and focused instead on the core issues of writing. 'The story of writing, for us whose sole concern may be said to be the Roman alphabet, resolves itself into the story of but one tool, the Pen.'[32] With it, the construction of letters on a standard pattern disentangled the complexities and uncertainties of writing and lettering under modern conditions.

> We are too apt to be perplexed with what seems to us a jumble of styles to choose from, when acknowledgement of but one style, permitting degrees of elaboration in execution according to circumstances would unravel the whole matter. This is the remedy suggested here. The tool which developed and preserved for us so magnificent an achievement of the Roman alphabet may well be trusted for the performance of our modern needs also.[33]

Hewitt had now fixed his sights, though much of what followed in *Lettering* (chapters 3–20) still resembled *Writing & illuminating, & lettering* by first summarizing the letters whose source was classical Rome, then examining the methods, uses and details of writing. Both books were concerned with the practical elements of writing, and acquiring a good 'hand'. Each devoted considerable attention to the Roman square capital as a cornerstone of contemporary writing and lettering, and a guide to present-day practice. Thereafter, however, Hewitt put forward his own, more personal, opinion of the proper aim of writing and lettering by returning to the issue he had raised in his introduction: legibility. Over four succeeding chapters, he again defended the pen's standard as the only one to which present-day conventions of legibility could be traced, the standard that conditioned both the form of letters and how these forms were recognized. And while Hewitt acknowledged that each context required its own kind of legibility, he continued to excoriate departures from scribal convention. Thus *Lettering* was, like *Writing & illuminating, & lettering*, partly an argument for the priority of writing in determining the Latin alphabet's most conventionally appropriate form. But Hewitt went further by insisting, in terms that were explicitly limiting, that pen-written forms derived from a Roman heritage should come before, and give order to, everything else. Where variety was required,

32. Hewitt, *Lettering*, p. 23.
33. Hewitt, *Lettering*, p. 28.

the pen's standard might be embellished, but only modestly, as implied by Hewitt's dictum of 'variety modifying order'. Diversity to any greater extent would encroach on those conventions he sought to defend.[34]

Graily Hewitt's tenure at the Central School lasted nearly three decades, until 1930; J. H. Mason retired in 1940, and Noel Rooke, as head of the School of Book Production, stayed on until 1947. They were among the last whose teaching reached back to the Central School's earliest years, and in the case of Hewitt and Mason, the potent if at times circumscribed approach to their disciplines underpinned teaching that was continuous and largely unwavering.[35] But by the late 1940s, changes first hinted at in the inter-war period were now more in evidence as teaching in design for print and in the use of letterforms and type became increasingly varied. A key figure in these changes was Jesse Collins. He had joined the Central School in the 1930s, but did not belong to the Mason tradition. As one of his students, Anthony Froshaug, later observed, Collins 'did a class on one evening a week in what I think was called advertising design. He … had in fact been brought in, … once a week for 2½ hours, perhaps to lend a touch of actuality to the course, which was art & crafts based.' By 1948, Collins was in a position to invite back his ex-student Froshaug to teach part-time at the Central.[36]

Froshaug's appointment represented an important shift in the outlook of the School of Book Production. The influences that informed his approach to typography were then uncommon in Britain. They were continental in origin and modern, and thus some distance from the historicizing tendency of the private press movement that underpinned teaching at the Central School.[37] A second figure who also joined the School of Book Production staff at this time was Herbert Spencer. He, too, brought an alternative view of the typographic designer's relationship to commercial printing.[38] And, at Froshaug's suggestion, Edward Wright began an evening class in 'extempore' typography (i.e. typography without preparation) involving the free play of wood type and letterpress furniture on the press bed to produce prints in a spontaneous and expressionistic manner. In these and other instances, new teaching methods were introduced, often small in scale but nonetheless exemplary by encouraging ways of working that were considerably different from what had gone before.[39]

By the early 1960s, many of the innovations that had refreshed teaching at the Central School in the 1950s had become well established. Their contribution to instruction in 'graphic design' involved an engagement with letterforms that was predominantly typographic, that is to say, where an understanding of letterforms was pursued less by making them oneself, than by receiving them ready-made as type. Some in the renamed School of Book Production and Graphic Design felt that teaching had now swung too far away from writing and lettering, whose

principles and possibilities had much to offer graphic designers otherwise preoccupied with type. To effect a change in emphasis, Nicholas Biddulph, then instructing students in letterform design, began collecting material to illustrate his classroom discussions. He first secured examples of Roman inscriptional letters that had been of such importance to his Central School forebears, Johnston and Hewitt.[40] Soon after, Biddulph was joined by Nicolete Gray who had been invited to develop with him a much expanded course in lettering. It would emphasize an historical understanding of letterforms while urging an adventurous and eclectic approach to their present-day design.

7

To provide some context for this new lettering course, and why the collecting of examples and artefacts began to accelerate soon after its launch, it is necessary to review some of Nicolete Gray's interests and

34. Though Edward Johnston never moved significantly beyond the broad-edged pen that he considered the 'essential arbiter' of letters – 'this magically seeming tool' – his conviction that letterforms were finally derived from the attributes of the tool and the medium left a more open, if unspecified, field for the subsequent development of writing and lettering. *Lettering* was reviewed by Johnston soon after its publication. He pointed out that Hewitt's concern to establish a standard had become disproportionately proscriptive: 'while the author shows appreciation of the value of variety, and points out that vitality and vigour are essential, yet – perhaps because of his strong desire to outline and prove a right standard – [there] is here and there a sense of prohibition which might check essays in the super-normal use of the pen, and even "obliterate", in a too literally faithful student, a "distracting choice" from that infinite variety which is the life of the craft.' Johnston, 'Review of *Lettering* by Graily Hewitt', *Artwork*, no. 28, Winter 1931. Hewitt's rigid, even doctrinaire, consolidation of Johnston's approach was, as mentioned, sometimes expressed in his attacks on 'block letters', a recurring irritation on both formal and moral grounds. In a letter (1935) to Sydney Cockerell, Hewitt wrote of Johnston's letters for the London Underground Railways: 'In Johnston I have lost confidence. Despite all he did for us at the beginning of this century he has undone too much by forsaking his standard of the classical Roman Alphabet – giving the world, without safeguard or explanation, his block letters which disfigure our modern life. His prestige has obscured their vulgarity and commercialism.' Quoted in Wilfrid Blunt, *Cockerell*, London: Hamish Hamilton, 1964, pp. 94–5). I am indebted to Justin Howes for both references in this note.

35. The components of their teaching were consistently lettering, wood-engraving, type composition and bookbinding; many students were trained as compositors for trade printing. Mason claimed the Central School as one of the few institutions training the 'typographic designer'. Notably, a prospectus from the late 1920s, after describing at length the work of fine book production at the Central School, ends 'but our main energies are devoted to the training of the London printer, and therefore our pre-occupation is with advertisement display and jobbing work'.

36. Froshaug's first, part-time, appointment in 1948 lasted three terms. He returned in 1952 to assume a full-time post as Senior Lecturer in Typography, though this appointment only lasted a further four terms. Quotation from Robin Kinross, *Anthony Froshaug, Documents of a life* (London: Hyphen Press, 2000), p. 99.

37. The influences Froshaug brought to his work and teaching were derived from the reforming New Typography first summarized by Jan Tschichold in Germany in the 1920s. Tschichold's *Typographische Entwurfstechnik* (1932) was especially important to Froshaug's thinking. See Kinross, *Anthony Froshaug, Typography & texts* (London: Hyphen Press, 2000), pp. 15–19.

38. This could be seen in Spencer's work as consultant to the publisher and printer Lund Humphries, and in his book *Design in business printing* (1952). Spencer also promulgated variety in the work of the typographic designer, as seen in *Typographica*, the periodical he edited from 1949. It brought new work from continental Europe to the attention of British designers.

39. To signal its broadening field of concerns, 'Graphic Design' was appended to 'School of Book Production' in 1951. Reporting on this change, Central School principal William Johnstone wrote: 'A contemporary approach … regarding elements of printing does not necessitate a deviation from the high standards of Mason's perfectionism, but rather the application of those standards to new patterns, forms, and techniques.' Johnstone, 'Graphic design at the Central School', *Penrose Annual*, vol. 47 (London: Lund Humphries, 1953), pp. 58–60. A less conciliatory view of this transition is provided by a student at the time, Ken Garland, who described Edward Wright's class as 'saved (for a while, at least) from the outrage of the trade printers by the fact that we were doing our awful thing only in the evening, and by the authority of Anthony Froshaug, who waged god knows how many bitter battles with those narrow-minded little people on our behalf.' Ken Garland, 'Graphic design in Britain 1951–61: a personal memoir', *A word in your eye* (Reading: The University of Reading, 1996) pp. 62–7; and in the same volume, 'Obituary: Anthony Froshaug 1920–84' (pp. 68–9) and 'Teaching and experiment' (p. 82). See also Edward Wright, 'The Central School of Arts and Crafts', *Edward Wright: graphic work & painting* (London: The Arts Council, 1985) p. 47; Robin Kinross, 'Letters in the city', *Eye*, vol. 3, no. 10, 1993, pp. 66–73; and Sylvia Backemeyer, '"Visual language": the growth of graphic design' in Backemeyer (ed.), *Making their mark: art, craft and design at the Central School 1896–1966* (London: Herbert Press, 2000) pp. 33–45, which includes a number of first-hand accounts. Discussion of this period of the Central School is also woven into Kinross, *Anthony Froshaug*, *Typography & texts*, pp. 29–30 and *Documents of a life*, pp. 94–103. (2018) See also Robin Fior, 'Working with Edward Wright', in Paul Stiff (ed.), *Modern typography in Britain: graphic design, politics, and society* (*Typography papers, 8*), (London: Hyphen Press, 2009), pp. 173–8.

40. The images Biddulph first acquired were taken by James Mosley, who had recently shot a series of photographs of inscriptional lettering in Rome. A set of enlargements were made from Mosley's negatives for Biddulph's teaching. See (e.g.) James Mosley. 'Trajan revived', in *Alphabet 1964: international annual of letterforms*, vol. 1, R. S. Hutchings (ed.) (London: James Moran, 1964), pp. 17–48.

concerns in the years before her arrival at the Central School. 'Of all those who have written about letterforms, there is surely no-one whose repertoire was quite so extensive as Nicolete Gray's. She spanned the centuries with consummate ease from ancient times to the twentieth century.'[41] This observation made by a younger contemporary shortly after Gray's death in 1997 alludes to an important feature of her work, the embrace of breadth and diversity in letterforms. The introduction to her first book, *Nineteenth century ornamented types and title pages* (1938) (figure 18), announced this: 'we need to explore, not to exclude'. The compendious documentation of nineteenth-century examples that followed was proof of her intentions. Exploring meant discovering the diversity of expression that letterforms could convey. Gray sensed around her a 'growing susceptibility to the power of suggestion and expression in letters', and *Nineteenth century ornamented types and title pages* demonstrated the ways this power could be delivered. And, as the embrace of letterforms widened, so too their range (and power) of suggestion and expression would grow. Gray's explorations showed her determination to avoid proscription dictated by orthodoxy, taste or fashion, and demonstrate that the expanse of lettering was far larger and more extraordinary than many allowed. *Nineteenth century ornamented types and title pages* was again proof of this, surveying an era of type and lettering whose exuberant and fantastical inventions had attracted the scholarly attention of few others.[42]

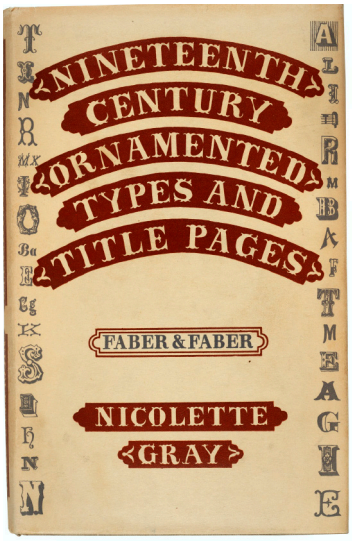
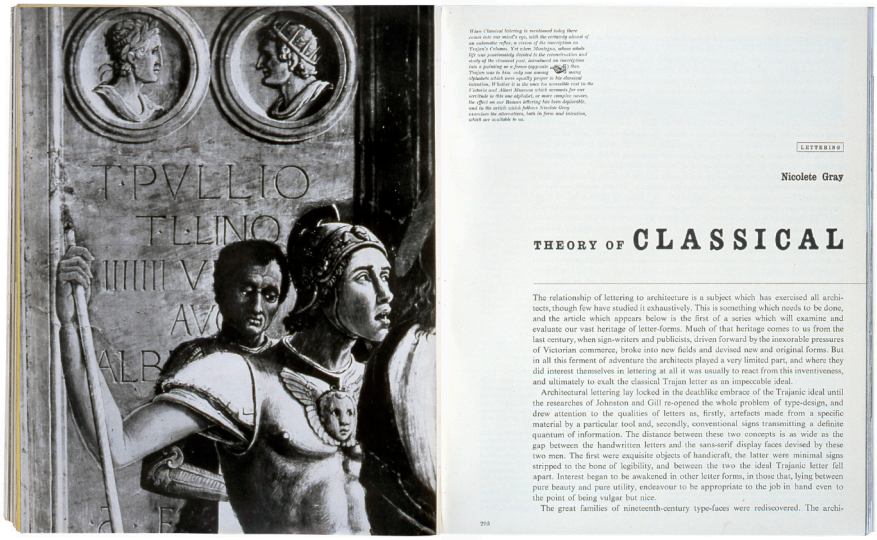


Figure 18. Nicolette Gray, *Nineteenth century ornamented types and title pages* (1938), cover, 218 x 135 mm.

Figures 19, 20. (opposite) *The Architectural Review*, spreads from articles by Nicolete Gray, 307 x 248 mm (page). **19.** 'Theory of Classical' (November 1953). **20.** 'Egyptians' (June 1954).

The inter-war interest in nineteenth-century letterforms, to which *Nineteenth century ornamented types and title pages* contributed, gathered pace in Britain after 1945.[43] This was evident at the 1951 Festival of Britain, for example, where a variety of slab serif/Egyptian designs were deployed on buildings and in publications to reinforce the Festival's celebration of domestic industrial creativity. Interest could also be found in the pages of *The Architectural Review*, where a series of articles commissioned from Gray between 1953 and 1959 considered letters in the built environment.[44] These articles gave sense, order and historical context to the different letterforms architects could make use of in their work, and employed numerous photographs to illustrate both their formal qualities and their relationship to buildings and places (figures 19, 20).

In 1960, Gray assembled her articles for the *The Architectural Review* in a book entitled *Lettering on buildings* (see figures 21–24, overleaf). The content and organization of the book echoed the serial form of the articles, giving arguments scattered across many issues of the magazine a more concentrated form, while allowing Gray to also expand the arguments and refine them, and add important new material. By way of introduction, Gray turned her attention to a theory of letterforms she felt had restrained their expressive use in architecture. This was the 'classical theory', originally a Renaissance formulation of letters articulated in a sequence of fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century treatises. Their common feature was the construction of Roman square capital letters based



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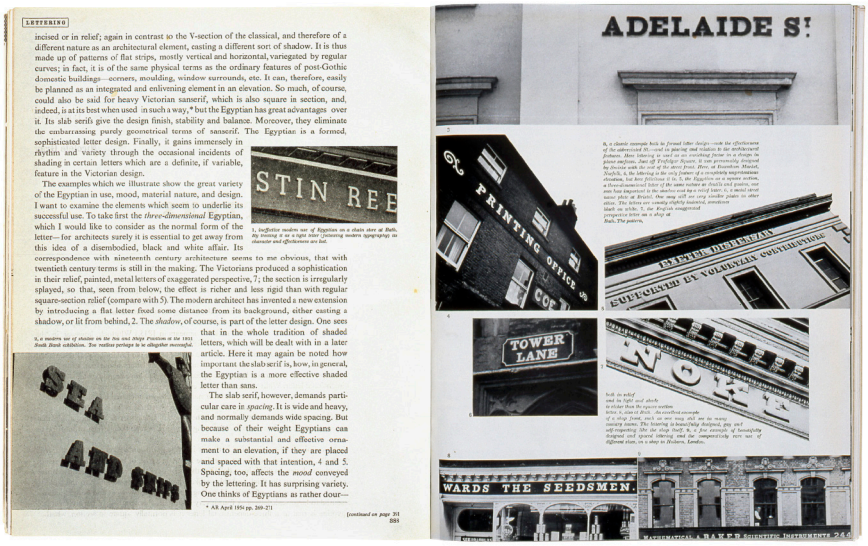

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41. Michael Twyman, 'Nicolete Gray: a personal view of her contribution to the study of letterforms', *Typography Papers*, 3 (Reading: Department of Typography & Graphic Communication, The University of Reading, 1998) pp. 87–102. This essay provides a review of those interests and ideas Nicolete Gray pursued throughout her working life. See also Frances Spalding's 'A true statement of a real thing' in the same publication (pp. 103–14). It describes Gray's interest in modern art, which informed her study and teaching of letterforms.

42. Quotations from *Nineteenth century ornamented types and title pages* (London: Faber & Faber, 1938). Gray made reference in her introduction to a doctrinaire view of typography to explain the relative lack of interest in letterforms from this era. 'We suffer today from the lucidity and insistence with which the principles of book typography have been explained to us. Having learnt our lesson we tend to apply it indiscriminately to all forms of lettering. "Typography is the efficient means to an essentially utilitarian and only accidentally aesthetic end …. If readers do not notice the consummate reticence and rare discipline of a new type it is probably a good letter." Mr. [Stanley] Morison has stated the austere doctrine in its most extreme form, but his idea is the logical root behind all doctrines that the primary purpose of all lettering must be legibility, that its only perfect attribute is simplicity.' (p. 13)

43. Further evidence in Britain of an interwar interest in nineteenth-century letterforms includes the release of typefaces such as Chisel, Playbill and Thorne Shaded by Stephenson Blake & Co. during the 1930s. These followed a renewal of interest in slab serif / Egyptian and fat face letterforms in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Discussion could also be found in the journal *Typography* (1936–9), whose editor Robert Harling was typographical adviser to Stephenson Blake.

44. 'Theory of Classical' (November 1953), pp. 295–302; 'Classical in practice' (December 1953), pp. 400–1; 'Sans' (April 1954), pp. 269–71; 'Egyptians' (June 1954), pp. 386–91; 'Ionic' (August 1954), pp. 119–20; 'Tuscan' (October 1954), pp. 259–61; 'Modern face and fat-face' (April 1955), pp. 273–4; 'Miniscule' [*sic*] (December1955), pp. 398–400; 'Alphabet' (August 1956), pp. 109–14; 'Street lettering' (April 1957), pp. 224–9; '3D' (October 1957), pp. 252–4; 'Material and design' (July 1958), pp. 30–4; 'Expressionism in lettering' (April 1959), pp. 272–6; 'The Modern movement' (May 1959), pp. 336–40.

Eminents observed Eric Kindel

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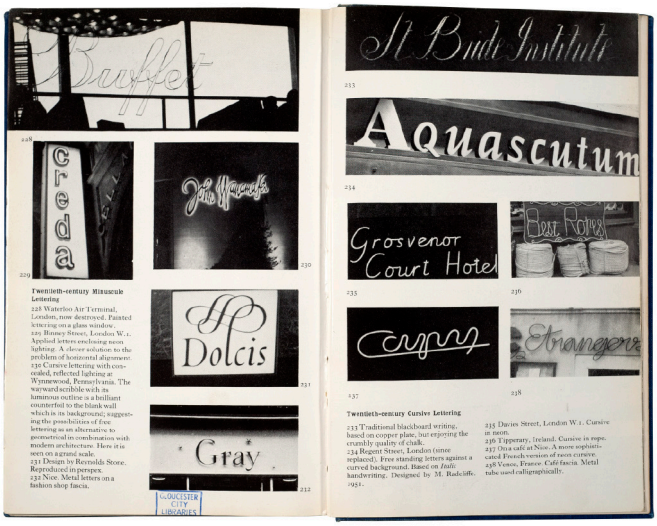

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Figures 21–23. Nicolete Gray, *Lettering on buildings* (1960), spreads, 220 x 140 mm (page). 'Roman Lettering' (21); 'Nineteenth-century Egyptian Lettering' (22); 'Twentieth-century Minuscule Lettering' (23).

on idealized proportions and other geometrical relations. In this theory, Gray detected an underlying Platonic ideal at work that neglected the mediating influence of size, material, purpose or function. In twentieth-century Britain, Gray argued, the classical theory had led to the adoption and use of a particular model, identified 'for convenience and through laziness' as those letterforms inscribed on the base of Trajan's Column in Rome. The result, in practice, was the tendency to uniformly impose Trajan letters – sometimes in a corrected and standardized form – on to many different contexts.

Gray linked this tendency to a misunderstanding of Edward Johnston's earlier proposal that 'essential forms' underpinned Roman square capital letters. But these, Johnston had insisted, were not an imposition of reductive uniformity but rather denoted a letterform's 'lowest-common-denominator' of structure and proportion, released from local detail. From its essential form, a letter could be made anew with various tools. Gray acknowledged that in Johnston's proposal there existed the possibility of avoiding homogeneity by way of the specific qualities wrought by the tool and, implicitly, the mediating circumstances of a letter's context of use. But what followed from Johnston, Gray argued, was often imitation and uniformity. Hewitt's self-imposed stricture of one tool – the broad-edged pen – and his desire for legibility and a single Roman standard were symptomatic. So, too, were Eric Gill's chiselled inscriptions, in their later manifestations excessively allied to his type designs and thereby lacking an animating spirit. From such evidence, Gray concluded that architectural lettering was in general stifled by a limited range of tools and media, and by an association with 'typographical ideas' that prioritized letterforms that were 'legible and unobtrusive'. Gray specifically challenged the transposition of the latter to architecture: 'with architectural lettering the typographical criteria must be reversed; the dominant factor is design not legibility.' Within the built environment, identity, character and location should come before mere legibility.[45]

Gray sought out lettering that was alive and appropriate to architecture. Uniformity was inimical, while diversity was essential in forms and materials responsive to physical context, meaning, even sound. She argued that a reductive view of letters was untenable when many forms might equally and purposefully represent a given letter and encompass a far greater range 'of feelings and intention, of purpose, abstract design and relation to architectural style ... for which no room exists in an idealist or purely classical theory of lettering.'[46] In place of a debilitating orthodoxy, Gray offered revision: 'I do not intend to present any sort of watertight theory, but to examine examples which I recognize as in some way admirable and to analyse what is in each which I admire; since the eye, not principle, is the basis of all judgement of visual things. I want to arrive at a new way of thinking about lettering from which nothing is excluded on *a priori* grounds.'

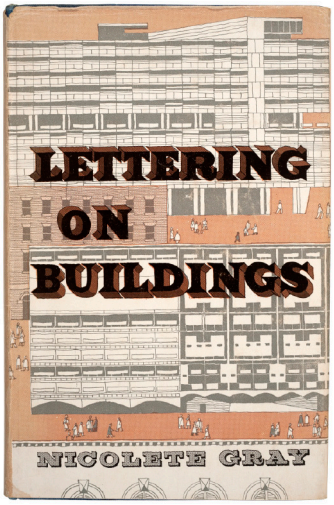

Figure 24. Nicolete Gray, *Lettering on buildings* (1960), cover, 225 x 150 mm. Jacket design by Gordon Cullen.

45. Quotations in this paragraph from *Lettering on Buildings*, pp. 19–20. Despite Gray's apparently novel arguments and observations, Edward Johnston made similar remarks many years before. In a lecture at the Leicester Municipal School of Art (1907) about decorative lettering of all kinds, he stated: 'Whenever you begin a new piece of work you are a beginner, and your way will be made clear for you by having this foundation: you will regard the thing itself – whether book, chest or building – as of primary importance, and adapt your lettering to it', and 'Generally I advise you to make your work as readable as you can, it is such a good discipline. But in many inscriptions ease of reading is not all important; & the less readableness matters, the less you are bound by practical limitations.' Johnston, *Lessons in formal writing*, pp. 97–8.

46. Quotations in this paragraph from *Lettering on Buildings*, p. 22.

Eminents observed Eric Kindel

The groups of letterforms Gray set out in the eight chapters that followed her introduction were organized around 'norms', which had, she postulated, crystallized at certain periods in history. Each norm – the Roman letter, sans serif, Egyptian, Tuscan, and so on – was not, however, reduced to a single, summary representation. Instead a norm suggested a kind of node, around which specific examples clustered to build up a composite description. The 269 photographs assembled in the book were largely grouped around these norms and illustrated their expressive range. But the photographs also made plain the extraordinary breadth of practice, for which a normative description of letters – despite allowing for formal variation – was inadequate in making sense of *in situ* factors at work in architecture. So, in the second part of *Lettering on buildings*, Gray proposed a 'comprehensive theory of lettering' able to address more fully those issues that lay beyond the classical theory, or the mere description of form, normative or otherwise.

Gray's comprehensive theory began by insisting that lettering (on buildings) be considered primarily in relationship to the built environment of which it was a part. She noted that while both architecture and lettering were substantially utilitarian and functional, they were 'unavoidably visual and formal' as well and this encouraged each towards the artistic. In fact the artistic element was often dominant, to the extent that the message of lettering might be delivered by material form alone. In addition, both architecture and lettering, as non-representational arts, were governed by abstraction. Modern twentieth-century art had assisted in the understanding of abstraction by demonstrating the value of experiencing form and materials on their own terms, and not as representations of something other. All of this had important implications for lettering. By considering the particularity of each instance of lettering – its utility, aesthetics and physical circumstances – expression far beyond mere two-dimensional form was possible. Gray's comprehensive theory thus began with the meaning of words and the fitness of a given design to carry this meaning, serve a stated purpose, and at the same time express the letterer's intentions; it encompassed good or bad form, in part determined by materials; and it concluded with the letterform itself, flexible and mutable, known to the letterer's mind as an idea, but not determined until the specifics of context gave it visible, physical form.

The photographs reproduced in *Lettering on buildings*, discussed in Part I as illustrations of form, were re-assessed in Part II according to Gray's comprehensive theory. Letterforms were now considered in terms of their fitness to purpose and expression, and in terms of the relationship observed between their design and the materials used to make them. By re-evaluating the photographs in this way, a richer and more complex understanding of lettering was put across. But the photographs also demonstrated other ideas, if implicitly. In extent, they were proof of Gray's wish to dispense with exclusivity and proscription. Their

arrangement in a continuous gallery precluded any from taking precedence; hierarchy was established, if at all, by chronology (though as Gray explained in her preface, this was a convenient way to suggest the subject's historical breadth). And in recording examples, photography *in situ* was preferred, in line with Gray's view that only by studying lettering in relation to its architectural setting could its effectiveness be gauged.

8

In *Lettering on buildings* it is possible to find many elements of the approach to letterforms that Nicolete Gray brought to the Central School when she joined its staff in 1965. This is first apparent in the curriculum of the lettering course that she began with Nicholas Biddulph. While the course surveyed principal features in the history and development of letterforms, much time was devoted to new creation. In preparation for this, students first explored the notion of ideal letters. Each student drew what they considered to be *the* letterforms of the (Latin) alphabet. The variations that inevitably emerged among the students, and in relation to existing letterforms, served to undermine the notion. The exercise offered a point of departure for analysing the attributes that gave letterforms that their own identity and distinguished them from other letters; it also demonstrated what alterations or embellishments could be made without a loss of identity. Then began letterform experiments, often developed around a specific visual theme or motif. The process fostered skills of visual analysis, drawing and design that enabled students to give expression to a text. Throughout, geometrical principles helped structure the work, while historical examples provided reference and inspiration. Over eleven days, the course presented a productive alternative to theories of the ideal, and a release from the contraints of predetermined (i.e. typographic) form.[47]

When Gray began her collaboration with Biddulph, an ambitious programme of image collecting was planned in support of the new course. Both Biddulph, in his initial assembly of images, and Gray, in *Lettering on buildings*, had already discovered the benefits of photography;

47. This summary is from Brian Yates, 'An introduction to letterform design', in F. Baudin & J. Dreyfus (eds), *Dossier A–Z: Association Typographique Internationale 1973* (Ardenne: Rémy Magermanns, 1973), pp. 101–5. Yates was head of the Department of Graphic Design (as it was by then known) at the Central School, and lent support and encouragement to the lettering course and to the collecting of images for study and reference. Biddulph and Gray also delivered papers at the Copenhagen congress on its theme of 'education in letterforms'. Gray's paper was subsequently published as 'Lettering and society' in *Visible Language* (vol. 8, no. 3, 1974, pp. 247–60); it encapsulated her view of lettering practice and enumerated the aims of the lettering course:

'1. It should teach students to draw, a particularly valuable contribution now that drawing from life is out of fashion; to distinguish and master the line which can alter the character of a letter by a minimal movement; and, if time allows, to master more than one drawing instrument.

'2. It should teach students to analyse existing alphabets, not just to recognise differences or learn the tricks of a style, but in order to find out the formal idiosyncrasies which create its character so as to be able to abstract and transpose these into their own idiom.

'3. It should teach students to think out design problems by integrating the conditions of material, purpose, wording, etc., with the formal and expressive qualities of the letters which they create.

'4. As a necessary tool for the third aim, students should have a wide vocabulary of letterforms, and know how to extend this vocabulary.

'Much of this implies a considerable knowledge of past lettering. This should not, I think, be taught as the history of lettering or through obliging the student to master historic styles. It should be introduced at various stages in the course, to illustrate solutions to problems or to demonstrate the many directions in which lettering can be extended as an art. We have found our most essential teaching aid to be our Collection of photographs of examples of all kinds of lettering.' (p. 260)

now it would enable them to quickly and inexpensively record lettering that was widely divergent in style, size and material. Photography would also allow examples to be documented in a variety of localities, capturing contextual features such as lighting, or the position of lettering relative to surrounding (built) features. Specific imaging techniques were also employed: high contrast black-white film isolated and emphasized two-dimensional shape and line, while macro- and telephoto lenses brought the unseen or unnoticed startlingly near.

From the outset, Gray and Biddulph were determined that the collection of photographs should not only serve the immediate needs of lettering course, but should have a broader function, too. So the collection was given a name, the Central Lettering Record (CLR), and a correspondingly larger ambition, to gather in 'the whole history and range of lettering including contemporary developments and experiments'. This echoed Gray's view that lettering should be understood as far wider in scope and richer than was generally acknowledged; in the years that followed, the work of building up and giving order to the CLR gave tangible form to this view. Examples were gathered and ordered primarily by technique and material. Thereafter, lettering in architecture was emphasized, as were groupings of historical and contemporary letterform norms, functional lettering (signs and street lettering), and experimental work that pushed against boundaries of convention. Each group had many subdivisions ranging across numerous periods and styles. The division of material was also intended to emphasize that which was thought most stimulating or instructive, both to the practitioner and the non-expert. The aim was to avoid an arrangement whose logic or nomenclature might mystify users or relegate examples to a single grouping when they could belong to several.[48]

By the mid 1970s, the organization of the CLR achieved a definite physical configuration when its photographs and other artefacts were given long-term accommodation in the Central School library. Most notable was an impressive bank of labelled drawers built to house photographs in the 'Standard Series', each of which was mounted on a 24 x 24 cm card held in a plastic sleeve.[49] While unremarkable in itself, this system made interaction straightforward: not only were the photographs simple to access, their compact storage meant that the extent of the collection could be quickly grasped and its contents easily retrieved. It encouraged both guided and serendipitous exploration, and, using cross-references provided with each photograph, facilitated comparisons. These features were echoed in the 'Letterform Series', which was stored in standard office filing cabinets. Its images of letterforms from a wide range of sources, assembled on 24 x 37 cm cards (also held in plastic sleeves), were similarly quick and easy to find, retrieve, study and compare (see figures 25–39, overleaf).

When Nicolete Gray retired from teaching in 1981, the course in lettering she had taught with Nicholas Biddulph began to contract, and with it the activities of the Central Lettering Record. The collection had by this time grown to a considerable size, and in addition to serving the course for which it was begun, it supported externally facing activities. Among these were exhibitions and publications that explored lettering's contribution to the visual arts and design,[50] and work to document architectural lettering in Britain at risk of demolition. Both were part of the broader remit Gray and Biddulph had formulated when the CLR was established, namely to reach audiences both within the Central School and beyond that were not typically interested in letterforms. These included practising artists and designers, and art and social historians for whom the holdings of the CLR might supplement their enquiries and enable them to traverse conventional discipline boundaries. But after Gray's retirement, funds to develop the archive along these lines were increasingly scarce, while a research assistant post assigned to the CLR during the 1970s and early 1980s was discontinued. Biddulph persisted with the eleven-day lettering course, now with other collaborators. But in 1984, as the Central School's graphic design curriculum began to merge with that of Saint Martin's School of Art, the length of the lettering course was cut in half, treating letterforms in a similar if now abbreviated way. The function of the CLR had thus shifted, no longer serving the specific aims set out by Gray and Biddulph but instead making more diffuse and intermittent contributions to letterform studies. When Biddulph retired in 1991, he left behind a collection whose original premise was understood by relatively few people.

In 1993, this period of contraction in the activities of the Central Lettering Record came to an end with the start of a new project whose programme of research would focus on the contribution screen-based interactive multimedia could make to the study of type- and letterform history.[51] An important part of the research would be to revisit the aims and resources of the CLR, both as a model for learning and study, and as an aid to teaching and scholarship. The gathering and recording of exemplars would also be reactivated, in particular to document the profusion of digital typefaces whose emergence from the mid 1980s onwards had coincided with the CLR's own cessation in collecting.

48. Leonora Pearse, 'The Central Lettering Record', *Art Libraries Journal*, Spring 1976, p. 14. Early collecting efforts at the Central Lettering Record also benefitted from a collaboration with the Department of Typography & Graphic Communication at the University of Reading, where a similar photographic archive was initiated at the same time. It remains active as part of that Department's lettering, printing and graphic design collections; it has extensive documentation of inscriptions from ancient and Baroque Rome, and from Renaissance Florence, and lettering of many kinds from around Britain.

49. While most photographs in the CLR were of this size, a significant number were enlargements whose subject matter was typical Roman epigraphy, which thus took on an appropriately epic dimension.

50. The most important of these was the exhibition 'Le tracé des lettres comme trace de l'histoire', organized in conjunction with the 1981 congress of the Association Typographique Internationale (ATypI) in Brussels and accompanied by a book under the same title, authored by Gray (Brussels: Palais des Beaux-arts, 1981, 32 pp).

51. 'B9 Interactive multimedia: creative uses of interface design for typographic research' This document was compiled by Simon Pugh, then Dean of the School of Graphic & Industrial Design, with contributions from Phil Baines and Colin Taylor. The proposal was supported by Central Saint Martins College of Art & Design using funds allocated by the Higher Education Funding Council for England.

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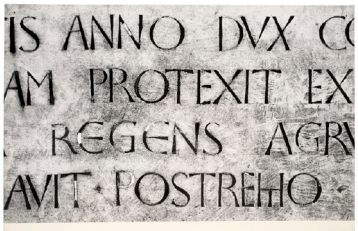

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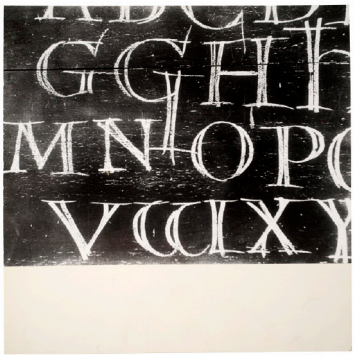

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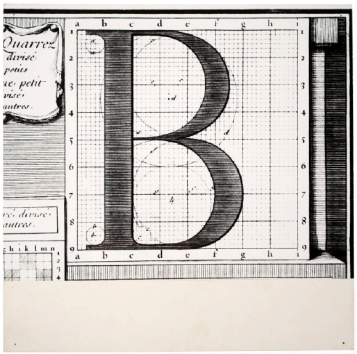

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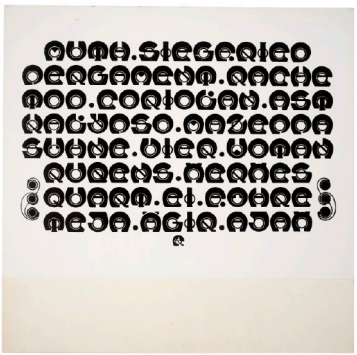

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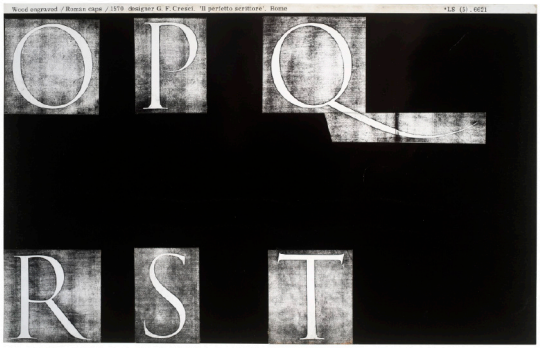

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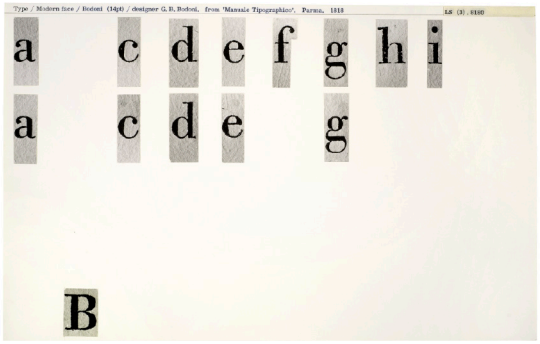

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Figures 25–36. (opposite) Central Lettering Record, Standard Series. 24 x 24 cm. **25.** Stone incription, Furius Dionysius Filocalus, Rome (late 4th century). **26.** Wine label, pierced silver, Charles Rawlings, England (1824–5). **27.** Street sign, painted wood, London (*c.* 19th century). **28.** Cafe sign, bronze (*c.* 1900). **29.** Stone inscription (with remnants of inlay), from the tomb of Spinetta Malaspina, Verona (15th century). **30.** Fascia lettering, ceramic, London Colosseum (1904). **31.** Blackboard demonstration, chalk, Edward Johnston (*c.* 1930). **32.** Engraved letter, model for capital letter 'B', Paris (before 1704). **33.** Specimen alphabet, Adalbert Carl Fischl, from *Beispiele künstlerischer Schrift* (Vienna: 1900). **34.** Fascia lettering, painted wood, London (19th/20th century, destroyed 1971). **35.** Fascia lettering, painted iron(?), Lincoln's Inn, London (date uncertain). **36.** Fascia lettering, ceramic tile, Britain (19th century). The Standard Series was designed as the basic photographic reference format. Photographs were organized into five main groups (technique, architectural lettering, letterform styles, creative & experimental lettering, and non-Latin lettering) with numerous subdivisions. Each photograph was mounted on a card held in a plastic sleeve (not shown) and stored in one of 270 labelled drawers. Details were given on an pre-printed paper form inserted behind the card; they included date, designer, location, a description of the image, and cross-references to other images in the Standard Series and to enlargements stored elsewhere.

Figures 37–39. Central Lettering Record, Letterform Series, 24 x 37 cm. **37.** Wood-engraved Roman capitals, Giovanni Francesco Cresci, from *Il perfetto scrittore* (1570). **38.** Printed type, Giambattista Bodoni, from *Manuale tipographico* (1818). **39.** Book hand (Foundational hand), Edward Johnston, from a copy sheet (1916). The Letterform Series was begun by Nicholas Biddulph in the mid-1970s and illustrated letterforms reaching back to the Roman republic. Though arranged by technique ('Ms', 'Type', 'Wood engraved', 'Stone inscription' and so on), its emphasis was on the form of individual letters rather than their mode or context of production. Imaging was largely achieved through macrophotography (by Biddulph), though in some instances high-contrast film was employed to isolate letterforms from their background. Photographs were typically cut apart and their letterforms arranged in alphabetical sequences. The series eventually comprised some 1100 cards held in plastic sleeves (not shown), which were stored in standard office filing cabinets.

Both series enabled users (including non-specialists) to quickly find, browse and compare material. The mounted photographs, held in plastic sleeves (not shown), were appropriately robust for informal classroom handling and display.

Eminents observed Eric Kindel

Typeform dialogues

To narrow the initially broad programme of research following the project's approval and funding, a decision was made to focus work principally on type and its many forms. To fully enagage with the larger sphere of lettering, as favoured by the founders of the CLR, lay beyond the capacity of the research team. But within the sphere of type, research work would echo an aim of the CLR by acknowledging, embracing and making sense of diversity. Work would be guided by other aims as well: to explore the presentation of (printed) typeforms onscreen; to exploit the CLR's extensive holdings to aid the demonstration of diversity; and to document and accession new types to the CLR, even if many could not be situated within the CLR's existing system of organization and nomenclature, or indeed within any existing scheme of typeface classification.

After developing a series of prototype screen interfaces, a configuration was achieved that was able to contain and express a survey of typeforms (figures 40, 41). (The interface, eventally named *Typeform dialogues*, is fully illustrated in the 'User's manual', pp. 5–36 above, accompanied by explanations of its features and their rationale.) The survey is made up of 140 types, a number thought sufficient to represent typeform diversity over five and a half centuries. Each chosen type is presented in a purely graphic form, described in a written profile, and shown in a printed context, typically an early use of the type, or in a specimen or other promotional document or advertisement. Underpinning each type is a description of its sources and attributes of form. This description is generated by a single, comprehensive framework able to cope with examples that are old or new, and whose forms are conventional or novel. Throughout the interface – indeed built into its configuration – comparison and cross-references demonstrate similarities and differences between types. Threads of relation, connection, evolution, deviation and disjuncture can be discovered and explored. Taken together, the 140 examples offer a representative view not only of typeform diversity but also of historical, technical and cultural narratives that make up their story, which is itself unified structurally and by a system of description whose method is consistent and encompassing.

Figures 40, 41. (opposite) Screen shots from the *Typeform dialogues* interface.

10

Looking back at a century of teaching at the Central School, London, *Typeform dialogues* takes its place in a line of published works and designed artefacts that give form to thinking about how writing, letterforms and types, in their profusion, complexity and diversity, should best be made sense of and used.

For those who played a formative role in the early Central School, above all Emery Walker and Edward Johnston, sense was found in the close relationship between the form of a letter and how it was made. Historical exemplars provided telling instances of this relationship at work, which could be transported into the present day untainted by

anachronism. The relationship was traced back to handwritten letters, made with an edged pen (narrow or broad), letters that expressed clarity and simplicity, and whose translation into types was fluent and vital, and guided by the technical and aesthetic qualities that printing needed to regain. By the early twentieth century, these notions conceived and articulated by Walker had became established and would prove enduring for the private presses and for programmes of study like that at the Central School. Johnston's teaching, and the publication of *Writing & illuminating, & lettering*, enabled his own conception of contemporary practice-based historical models to also become firmly rooted.

But the results from the search for appropriate models for practice encouraged in those who followed not further exploration but tenacious consolidation, not more experiment but entrenched defence of early discoveries. This is true of Graily Hewitt and J. H. Mason, who, as eminent guides to writing and lettering, type and typography, set limits on the tools and materials thought fit for practice, and consequently on the variety of work done in the classroom or in their own professional activities. These limits frequently gave rise to finely crafted books and other documents, assembled from materials of excellent quality, in forms of high refinement, using texts of scholarly or literary merit. Such work suited Hewitt and Mason, driven by their intellectual dispositions (Hewitt was a barrister by training, Mason a self-taught classicist). Both men were less concerned with form-making as such, and more with its proper derivation and principled application. Their discipline of means reinforced the foundations that the Central School had established early on. But over time, and by the 1930s, the potently condensed teaching of Hewitt and Mason had become recalcitrant in its control of creative boundaries.

Where instruction was pursued in the first several decades of the Central School through a single tool, the pen, for writing and lettering, or a singular view of type and typography, for making fine books, teaching after the Second World War drew on a broader field of reference, and was more synthetic and often purposely experimental. New teachers expanded or reconfigured tools and media to suit the emerging work of graphic design. The collaboration of Nicolete Gray and Nicholas Biddulph reflected this. In their teaching, norms and variations, historical inspiration and pure aesthetics offered numerous points of entry into a process of design that combined drawing and analysis with an eclectic vocabulary of form. Gray and Biddulph aimed to radically expand their students' experience of letterforms and thereby extend the expressive range of work they could produce. The Central Lettering Record gave substance to this aim, following Gray's own argument 'that lettering can and should be infinitely diverse.'

Typeform dialogues follows this approach in several ways: its 'survey' also suggests compendiousness and demonstrates how historical and contemporary artefacts, practices and contexts all contribute to

an inclusive understanding of typeforms. *Typeform dialogues*, like the Central Lettering Record, shows in its principles of selection, organization and construction that no examples should be excluded, as Gray put it, *a priori*. Where the CLR did this expansively, *Typeform dialogues* does so selectively, but with the implication that any typeform may be described in full by its combined means of presentation, narrative and analysis. But whatever parallels may be drawn with eminent predecessors, *Typeform dialogues* should also be judged as the product of a digital, interactive environment, in which the ideas specific to the circumstances of its making can be most clearly discerned.

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Image sources
Figure 1: St Bride Library, London
Figures 2–6, 9, 14–18, 21–24: Private collections
Figures 7, 8, 10, 25–41: Central Lettering Record, Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design, London
Figure 11: Collections of the Department of Typography & Graphic Communication, University of Reading
Figures 12, 13: Museum & Study Collection, Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design, London
Figures 19, 20: Reading University Library, University of Reading

Object photography
Figure 1: St Bride Library, London
Figures 2–9, 15–39: Laura Bennetto
Figure 10: the author
Figures 12, 13: Museum & Study Collection, Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design, London